PLANTATION

EDITION

VOLUME VI

She was the first to break the silence.

(PAGE 134)

THE NOVELS, STORIES, SKETCHES AND POEMS OF THOMAS NELSON PAGE

GORDON KEITH

I

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TO
A GRANDDAUGHTER
OF ONE LOIS HUNTINGTON

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	GORDON KEITH'S PATRIMONY	1
II	GENERAL KEITH BECOMES AN OVERSEER	28
III	THE ENGINEER AND THE SQUIRE	51
IV	TWO YOUNG MEN	78
V	THE RIDGE COLLEGE	98
VI	ALICE YORKE	117
VII	MRS. YORKE FINDS A GENTLEMAN	144
VIII	MR. KEITH'S IDEALS	156
IX	MR. KEITH IS UNPRACTICAL	166
X	MRS. YORKE CUTS A KNOT	188
XI	GUMBOLT	214
XII	KEITH DECLINES AN OFFER	246
XIII	KEITH IN NEW YORK	270
XIV	THE HOLD-UP	303
XV	MRS. YORKE MAKES A MATCH	338
XVI	KEITH VISITS NEW YORK, AND MRS. LANCASTER SEES A GHOST	361
XVII	KEITH MEETS NORMAN	388
XVIII	MRS. LANCASTER	408

GORDON KEITH

VOL I.

GORDON KEITH

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

GORDON KEITH'S PATRIMONY

GORDON KEITH was the son of a gentleman. And this fact, like the cat the honest miller left to his youngest son, was his only patrimony. As in that case also, it stood to the possessor in the place of a good many other things. It helped him over many rough places. He carried it with him as a devoted Romanist wears a sacred scapulary next to the heart.

His father, General McDowell Keith of "Elphinstone," was a gentleman of the old kind, a type so old-fashioned that it is hardly accepted these days as having existed. He knew the Past and lived in it; the Present he did not understand, and the Future he did not know. In his latter days, when his son was growing up, after war had swept like a vast inundation over the land, burying almost everything it had not borne

away, General Keith still survived, unchanged, unmoved, unmarred, an antique memorial of the life of which he was a relic. His one standard was that of a gentleman.

This idea was what the son inherited from the father along with some other old-fashioned things which he did not know the value of at first, but which he came to understand as he grew older.

When in after times, in the swift rush of life in a great city, amid other scenes and new manners, Gordon Keith looked back to the old life on the Keith plantation, it appeared to him as if he had lived then in another world.

Elphinstone was, indeed, a world to itself: a long, rambling house, set on a hill, with white-pillared verandahs, closed on the side toward the evening sun by green Venetian blinds, and on the other side looking away through the lawn trees over wide fields, brown with fallow, or green with cattle-dotted pasture-land and waving grain, to the dark rim of woods beyond. To the westward "the Ridge" made a straight, horizontal line, except on clear days, when the mountains still farther away showed a tenderer blue scalloped across the sky.

A stranger passing through the country prior

to the war would have heard much of Elphinstone, the Keith plantation, but he would have seen from the main road (which, except in summer, was intolerably bad) only long stretches of rolling fields well tilled, and far beyond them a grove on a high hill, where the mansion rested in proud seclusion amid its immemorial oaks and elms, with what appeared to be a small hamlet lying about its feet. Had he turned in at the big-gate and driven a mile or so, he would have found that Elphinstone was really a world to itself, almost as much cut off from the outer world as the home of the Keiths had been in the old country. A number of little blacks would have opened the gates for him; several boys would have run to take his horse, and he would have found a legion of servants about the house. He would have found that the hamlet was composed of extensive stables and barns, with shops and houses, within which mechanics were plying their trades with the ring of hammers, the clack of looms, and the hum of spinning-wheels—all for the plantation; whilst on a lower hill farther to the rear were the servants' quarters laid out in streets, filled with children.

Had the visitor asked for shelter, he would have received, whatever his condition, a hospi-

tality as gracious as if he had been the highest in the land; he would have found culture with philosophy and wealth with content, and he would have come away charmed with the graciousness of his entertainment. And yet, if from any other country or region than the South, he would have departed with a feeling of mystification, as though he had been drifting in a counter-current and had discovered a part of the world sheltered and to some extent secluded from the general movement and progress of life.

This plantation, then, was Gordon's world. The woods that rimmed it were his horizon, as they had been that of the Keiths for generations; more or less they always affected his horizon. His father appeared to the boy to govern the world; he governed the most important part of it—the plantation—without ever raising his voice. His word had the convincing quality of a law of nature. The quiet tones of his voice were irresistible. The calm face, lighting up at times with the flash of his gray eyes, was always commanding: he looked so like the big picture in the library of a tall, straight man, booted and spurred, and partly in armor, with a steel hat over his long curling hair, and a grave face that looked as if the sun were on it. It was

no wonder, thought the boy, that he was given a sword by the State when he came back from the Mexican War; no wonder that the Governor had appointed him Senator, a position he declined because of his wife's ill health. Gordon's wonder was that his father was not made President or Commander-in-Chief of the army. It no more occurred to him that any one could withstand his father than that the great oak-trees in front of the house, which it took his outstretched arms six times to girdle, could fall.

Yet it came to pass that within a few years an invading army marched through the plantation, camped on the lawn, and cut down the trees; and Gordon Keith, whilst yet a boy, came to see Elphinstone in the hands of strangers, and his father and himself thrown out on the world.

His mother died while Gordon was still a child. Until then she had not appeared remarkable to the boy: she was like the atmosphere, the sunshine, and the blue, arching sky, all-pervading and existing as a matter of course. Yet, as her son remembered her in after life, she was the centre of everything, never idle, never hurried; every one and everything revolved about her and received her light and warmth. She was the refuge in every trouble, and her

smile was enchanting. It was only after that last time, when the little boy stood by his mother's bedside awed and weeping silently in the shadow of the great darkness that was settling upon them, that he knew how absolutely she had been the centre and breath of his life. His father was kneeling beside the bed, with a face as white as his mother's, and a look of such mingled agony and resignation that Gordon never forgot it. As, because of his father's teaching, the son in later life tried to be just to every man, so, for his mother's sake, he remembered to be kind to every woman.

In the great upheaval that came just before the war, Major Keith stood for the Union, but was defeated. When his State seceded, he raised a regiment in the congressional district which he had represented for one or two terms. As his duties took him from home much of the time, he sent Gordon to the school of the noted Dr. Grammer, a man of active mind and also active arm, named by his boys, from the latter quality, "Old Hickory."

Gordon, like some older men, hoped for war with all his soul. A great-grandfather an officer of the line in the Revolution, a grandfather in the navy of 1812, and his father a major in

the Mexican War, with a gold-hilted sword presented him by the State, gave him a fair pedigree, and he looked forward to being a great general himself. He would be Julius Cæsar or Alexander the Great at least. It was his preference for a career, unless being a mountain stage-driver was. He had seen one or two such beings in the mountains when he accompanied his father once on a canvass that he was making for Congress, enthroned like Jove, in clouds of oil-coats and leather, mighty in power and speech; and since then his dreams had been blessed at times with lumbering coaches and clanking teams.

One day Gordon was sent for to come home. When he came down-stairs next morning his father was standing in the drawing-room, dressed in full uniform, though it was not near as showy as Gordon had expected it to be, or as dozens of uniforms the boy had seen the day before about the railway-stations on his journey home, gorgeous with gold lace. He was conscious, however, that some change had taken place, and a resemblance to the man-in-armor in the picture over the library mantel suddenly struck the boy. There was the high look, the same light in the eyes, the same gravity about

the mouth; and when his father, after taking leave of the servants, rode away in his gray uniform, on his bay horse "Chevalier," with his sword by his side, to join his men at the county-seat, and let Gordon accompany him for the first few miles, the boy felt as though he had suddenly been transported to a world of which he had read, and were riding behind a knight of old. Ah! if there were only a few Roundheads formed at the big-gate, how they would scatter them!

About the third year of the war, Mr. Keith, now a brigadier-general, having been so badly wounded that it was supposed he could never again be fit for service in the field, was sent abroad by his government to represent it in England in a semi-confidential, semi-diplomatic position. He had been abroad before—quite an unusual occurrence at that time.

General Keith could not bring himself to leave his boy behind him and have the ocean between them, so he took Gordon with him.

After a perilous night in running the blockade, when they were fired on and escaped only by sending up rockets and passing as one of the blockading squadron, General Keith and Gordon transferred at Nassau to their steamer. The vessel touched at Halifax, and among the pas-

sengers taken on there were an American lady, Mrs. Wickersham of New York, and her son Ferdy Wickersham, a handsome, black-eyed boy a year or two older than Gordon. As the two lads were the only passengers aboard of about their age, they soon became as friendly as any other young animals would have become, and everything went on balmily until a quarrel arose over a game which they were playing on the lower deck. As General Keith had told Gordon that he must be very discreet while on board and not get into any trouble, the row might have ended in words had not the sympathy of the sailors been with Gordon. This angered the other boy in the dispute, and he called Gordon a liar. This, according to Gordon's code, was a cause of war. He slapped Ferdy in the mouth, and the next second they were at it hammer-and-tongs. So long as they were on their feet, Ferdy, who knew something of boxing, had much the best of it and punished Gordon severely, until the latter, diving into him, seized him.

In wrestling Ferdy was no match for him, for Gordon had wrestled with every boy on the plantation, and after a short scuffle he lifted Ferdy and flung him flat on his back on the deck, jar-

ring the wind out of him. Ferdy refused to make up and went off crying to his mother, who from that time filled the ship with her abuse of Gordon.

The victory of the younger boy gave him great prestige among the sailors, and Mike Doherty, the bully of the forecastle, gave him boxing lessons during all the rest of the voyage, teaching him the mystery of the "side swing" and the "left-hand upper-cut," which Mike said was "as good as a belaying-pin."

"With a good, smooth tongue for the girlls and a good upper-cut for thim as treads on your toes, you are aall right," said Mr. Doherty; "you're rigged for ivery braize. But, boy, remimber to be quick with both, and don't forgit who taaught you."

Thus, it was that, while Gordon Keith was still a boy of about twelve or thirteen, instead of being on the old plantation rimmed by the great woods, where his life had hitherto been spent, except during the brief period when he had been at Dr. Grammer's school, he found himself one summer in a little watering-place on the shores of an English lake as blue as a china plate, set amid ranges of high green hills, on which nes-

tled pretty white or brown villas surrounded by gardens and parks.

The water was a new element for Gordon. The home of the Keiths was in the high country back from the great watercourses, and Gordon had never had a pair of oars in his hands, nor did he know how to swim; but he meant to learn. The sight of the boats rowed about by boys of his own age filled him with envy. And one of them, when he first caught sight of it, inspired him with a stronger feeling than envy. It was painted white and was gay with blue and red stripes around the gunwale. In it sat two boys. One, who sat in the stern, was about Gordon's age; the other, a little larger than Gordon, was rowing and used the oars like an adept. In the bow was a flag, and Gordon was staring at it, when it came to him with a rush that it was a "Yankee" flag. He was conscious for half a moment that he took some pride in the superiority of the oarsman over the boys in the other boats. His next thought was that he had a little Confederate flag in his trunk. He had brought it from home among his other treasures. He would show his colors and not let the Yankee boys have all of the honors. So away he put as hard as his legs could carry him.

When he got back to the waterside he hired a boat from among those lying tied at the stairs, and soon had his little flag rigged up, when, taking his seat, he picked up the oars and pushed off. It was rather more difficult than it had looked. The oars would not go together. However, after a little he was able to move slowly, and was quite elated at his success when he found himself out on the lake. Just then he heard a shout:

"Take down that flag!"

Gordon wished to turn his boat and look around, but could not do so. However, one of the oars came out of the water, and as the boat veered a little he saw the boys in the white boat with the Union flag bearing down on him.

The oarsman was rowing with strong, swift strokes even while he looked over his shoulder, and the boat was shooting along as straight as an arrow, with the clear water curling about its prow. Gordon wished for a moment that he had not been so daring, but the next second his fighting blood was up, as the other boy called imperiously:

"Strike that flag!"

Gordon could see his face now, for he was almost on him. It was round and sunburnt, and

the eyes were blue and clear and flashing with excitement. His companion, who was cheering him on, was Ferdy Wickersham.

"Strike that flag, I say," called the oarsman.

"I won't. Who are you? Strike your own flag."

"I am Norman Wentworth. That's who I am, and if you don't take that flag down I will take it down for you, you little nigger-driving rebel."

Gordon Keith was not a boy to neglect the amenities of the occasion.

"Come and try it then, will you, you nigger-stealing Yankees!" he called. "I will fight both of you." And he settled himself for defence.

"Well, I will," cried his assailant. "Drop the tiller, Ferdy, and sit tight. I will fight fair." Then to Gordon again: "I have given you fair warning, and I will have that flag or sink you."

Gordon's answer was to drop one oar as useless, seize the other, and, steadying himself as well as he could, raise it aloft as a weapon.

"I will kill you if you try it," he said between clinched teeth.

However, the boy rowing the other boat was not to be frightened. He gave a vigorous stroke

of his oars that sent his boat straight into the side of Gordon's boat.

The shock of the two boats coming together pitched Gordon to his knees, and came near flinging him into the water; but he was up again in a second, and raising his oar, dealt a vicious blow with it, not at the boy in the boat, but at the flag in the bow of the boat. The unsteadiness of his footing, however, caused him to miss his aim, and he only splintered his oar into fragments.

"Hit him with the oar, Norman," called the boy in the stern. "Knock him out of the boat."

The other boy made no answer, but with a quick turn of his wrist twisted his boat out of its direct course and sent it skimming off to one side. Then dropping one oar, he caught up the other with both hands, and with a rapid, dexterous swing swept a cataract of water in Gordon's face, drenching him, blinding him, and filling his eyes, mouth, and ears with the unexpected deluge. Gordon gasped and sputtered, and before he could recover from this unlooked-for flank movement, another turn of the wrist brought the attacking boat sharp across his bow, and, with a shout of triumph, Norman wrenched the defiant flag out of its socket.

Gordon had no time for thought. He had time only to act. With a cry, half of rage, half of defiance, he sprang up on the point of the bow of his boat, and with outstretched arms launched himself at the bow of the other, where the captor had flung the flag, to use both oars. His boat slipped from under his feet, and he fell short, but caught the gunwale of the other, and dragged himself up to it. He held just long enough to clutch both flags, and the next second, with a faint cheer, he rolled off and sank with a splash in the water.

Norman Wentworth had risen, and with blazing eyes, his oar uplifted, was scrambling toward the bow to repel the boarder, when the latter disappeared. Norman gazed at the spot with staring eyes. The next second he took in what was happening, and, with an exclamation of horror, he suddenly dived overboard. When he came to the top, he was pulling the other boy up with him.

Though Norman was a good swimmer, there was a moment of extreme danger; for, half-unconscious, Gordon pulled him under once. But fortunately Norman kept his head, and with a supreme effort breaking the drowning boy's hold, he drew him to the top once more. Fortu-

nately for both, a man seeing the trouble had brought his boat to the spot, and, just as Norman rose to the surface with his burden, he reached out and, seizing him, dragged both him and the now unconscious Gordon aboard his boat.

It was some days before Gordon was able to sit up, and meanwhile he learned that his assailant and rescuer had been every day to make inquiry about him, and his father, Mr. Wentworth, had written to Gordon's father and expressed his concern at the accident.

"It is a strange fate," he wrote, "that should after all these years have arrayed us against each other thus, and have brought our boys face to face in a foreign land. I hear that your boy behaved with the courage which I knew your son would show."

General Keith, in turn, expressed his gratitude for the promptness and efficiency with which the other's son had apprehended the danger and met it.

"My son owes his life to him," he said. "As to the flag, it was the fortune of war," and he thought the incident did credit to both combatants. He "only wished," he said, "that in every fight over a flag there were the same

ability to restore to life those who defended it."

Gordon, however, could not participate in this philosophic view of his father's. He had lost his flag; he had been defeated in the battle. And he owed his life to his victorious enemy.

He was but a boy, and his defeat was gall and wormwood to him. It was but very little sweetened by the knowledge that his victor had come to ask after him.

He was lying in bed one afternoon, lonely and homesick and sad. His father was away, and no one had been in to him for, perhaps, an hour. The shrill voices of children and the shouts of boys floated in at the open window from somewhere afar off. He was not able to join them. It depressed him, and he began to pine for the old plantation—a habit that followed him through life in the hours of depression.

Suddenly there was a murmur of voices outside the room, and after a few moments the door softly opened, and a lady put her head in and looked at him. She was a stranger and was dressed in a travelling-suit. Gordon gazed at her without moving or uttering a sound. She came in and closed the door gently behind her, and then walked softly over to the side of the

bed and looked down at him with kind eyes. She was not exactly pretty, but to Gordon she appeared beautiful, and he knew that she was a friend. Suddenly she dropped down on her knees beside him and put her arm over him caressingly.

"I am Norman's mother," she said, "and I have come to look after you and to take you home with me if they will let me have you." She stooped over and kissed him.

The boy put up his pinched face and kissed her.

"I will go," he said in his weak voice.

She kissed him again, and smiled down at him with moist eyes, and talked to him in tender tones, stroking his hair and telling him of Norman's sorrow for the trouble, of her own unhappiness, and of her regret that the doctors would not let him be moved. When she left, it was with a promise that she would come back again and see him; and Gordon knew that he had a friend in England of his own kind, and a truth somehow had slipped into his heart which set at odds many opinions which he had thought principles. He had never thought to feel kindly toward a Yankee.

When Gordon was able to be out again, his

father wished him to go and thank his former foe who had rescued him. But it was too hard an ordeal for the boy to face. Even the memory of Mrs. Wentworth could not reconcile him to this.

"You don't know how hard it is, father," he said, with that assurance with which boyhood always draws a line between itself and the rest of the world. "Did you ever have to ask pardon of one who had fought you?"

General Keith's face wore a singular expression. Suddenly he felt a curious sensation in a spot in his right side, and he was standing in a dewy glade in a piece of woodland on a Spring morning, looking at a slim, serious young man standing very straight and still a few paces off, with a pistol gripped in his hand, and, queerly enough, his name, too, was Norman Wentworth. But he was not thinking of him. He was thinking of a tall girl with calm blue eyes, whom he had walked with the day before, and who had sent him away dazed and half maddened. Then some one a little to one side spoke a few words and began to count, "One, two—" There was a simultaneous report of two pistols, two little puffs of smoke, and when the smoke had cleared away, the other man with the pistol was sinking

slowly to the ground, and he himself was tottering into the arms of the man nearest him.

He came back to the present with a gasp.

"My son," he said gravely, "I once was called on and failed. I have regretted it all my life, though happily the consequences were not as fatal as I had at one time apprehended. If every generation did not improve on the follies and weaknesses of those that have gone before, there would be no advance in the world. I want you to be wiser and stronger than I."

Gordon's chance of revenge came sooner than he expected. Not long after he got out of doors again he was on his way down to the lake, where he was learning to swim, when a number of boys whom he passed began to hoot at him. In their midst was Ferdy Wickersham, the boy who had crossed the ocean with him. He was setting the others on. The cry that came to Gordon was: "Nigger-driver! Nigger-driver!" Sometimes Fortune, Chance, or whatever may be the deity of fortuitous occurrence, places our weapons right to hand. What would David have done had there not been a stony brook between him and Goliath that day? Just as Gordon with burning face turned to defy his deriders, a pile of small stones lay at his feet. It looked like

Providence. He could not row a boat, but he could fling a stone like young David. In a moment he was sending stones up the hill with such rapidity that the group above him were thrown into confusion.

Then Gordon fell into an error of more noted generals. Seizing a supply of missiles, he charged straight up the hill. Though the group had broken at the sudden assault, by the time he reached the hill-top they had rallied, and while he was out of ammunition they made a charge on him. Wheeling, he went down the hill like the wind, while his pursuers broke after him with shouts of triumph. As he reached the stone-pile he turned and made a stand, which brought them to a momentary stop. Just then a shout arose below him. Gordon turned to see rushing up the hill toward him Norman Wentworth. He was picking up stones as he ran. Gordon heard him call out something, but he did not wait for his words. Here was his arch-enemy, his conqueror, and here, at least, he was his equal. Without wasting further time with those above him, Gordon sprang toward his new assailant, and steadying himself, hurled his heaviest stone. Fortunately, Norman Wentworth had been reared in the country and knew

how to dodge as well as to throw a stone, or his days might have ended then and there.

"Hold on! don't throw!" he shouted; "I am coming to help you," and, without waiting, he sent a stone far over Gordon's head at the party on the height above. Gordon, who was poising himself for another shot, paused amazed in the midst of his aim, open-mouthed and wide-eyed.

"Come on," cried Norman. "You and I together can lick them. I know the way, and we will get above them." So saying, he dashed down a side alley, Gordon close at his heels, and, by making a turn, they came out a few minutes later on the hill above their enemies, who were rejoicing in their easy victory, and, catching them unprepared, routed them and scattered them in an instant.

Ferdy Wickersham, finding himself defeated, promptly surrendered and offered to enlist on their side. Norman, however, had no idea of letting him off so easy.

"I am going to take you prisoner, but not until I have given you a good kicking. You know better than to take sides against an American."

"He is a rebel," said Ferdy.

"He is an American," said Norman. And he

forthwith proceeded to make good his word, and to do it in such honest style that Ferdy, after first taking it as a joke, got angry and ran away howling.

Gordon was doubtful as to the wisdom of this severity.

"He will tell," he said.

"Let him," said Norman, contemptuously. "He knows what he will get if he does. I was at school with him last year, and I am going to school with him again. I will teach him to fight with any one else against an American!"

This episode made the two boys closer allies than they would have been in a year of peace.

General Keith, finding his mission fruitless, asked leave to return home immediately, so that Gordon saw little more of his former foe and new ally.

A few days before their departure, Gordon, passing along a road, came on a group of three persons, two children and a French governess with much-frizzled hair, very black eyes, and a small waist. One of the children was a very little girl, richly dressed in a white frock with a blue sash that almost covered it, with big brown eyes and yellow ringlets; the other child was a ragged girl several years older, with tan-

gled hair, gray eyes, and the ruddy, chubby cheeks so often seen in children of her class. The governess was in a state of great excitement, and was talking French so fast that it was a wonder any tongue could utter the words. The little girl of the fine frock and brown eyes was clutching to her bosom with a defiant air a large doll which the governess was trying to get from her, while the other child stood by, looking first toward one of them and then toward the other, with an expression divided between timidity and eagerness. A big picture of a ballet-dancer with a gay frock and red shoes in a flaring advertisement on a sign-board had something to do with the trouble. Now the girl drew nearer to the other child and danced a few steps, holding out her hand; now she cast a look over her shoulder down the hill, as if to see that her retreat were not cut off.

"*Mais, c'est à moi*—it's *my* doll. I *will* have it," insisted the little girl, backing away and holding it firmly; at which the governess began again almost tearing her hair in her desperation, though she ended by giving it a pat to see that it was all right.

The approach of Gordon drew her attention to him.

"Oh," she exclaimed in desperation, "*c'est épouvantable*—it ees terr-e-ble! Dese young ladie weel give de doll to dat meeseerable creature!"

"She is not a 'meeseerable creature'!" insisted the little girl, mocking her, her brown eyes flashing. "She danced for me, and I will give it to her—I like her."

"Oh, *ciel!* What shall I do! Madame weel abuse me—weel keel me!"

"Mamma will not mind; it is *my* doll. Aunt Abby gave it to me. I can get a plenty more, and I *will* give it to her," insisted the little girl again. Then suddenly, gaining more courage, she turned quickly, and, before the governess could stop her, thrust the doll into the other child's arms.

"Here, you *shall* have it."

The governess, with a cry of rage, made a spring for the child, but too late: the grimy little hands had clutched the doll, and turning without a word of thanks, the little creature sped down the road like a frightened animal, her ragged frock fluttering behind her.

"Why, she did not say 'Thank you'!" exclaimed the child, in a disappointed tone, looking ruefully after the retreating figure.

The governess broke out on her vehemently in French, very comically mingling her upbraidings of her charge, her abuse of the little girl, and her apprehension of "Madame."

"Never mind; she does not know any better," said Gordon.

The child's face brightened at this friendly encouragement.

"She is a nasty little creature! You shall not play with her," cried the governess, angrily.

"She is not nasty! I like her, and I will play with her," declared the child, defiantly.

"What is your name?" asked the boy, much amused by such sturdiness in so small a tot.

"Lois Huntington. What is your name?" She looked up at him with her big brown eyes.

"Gordon Keith."

"How do you do, Gordon Keith?" She held out her hand.

"How do you do, Lois Huntington?"

She shook hands with him solemnly.

A day or two later, as Gordon was passing through one of the streets in the lower part of the village, he came upon a hurdy-gurdy playing a livelier tune than most of them usually gave. A crowd of children had gathered in the street. Among them was a little barelegged girl who,

inspired by the music, was dancing and keeping perfect time as she tripped back and forth, pirouetted and swayed on the tips of her bare toes, flirting her little ragged frock, and kicking with quite the air of a ballet-dancer. She divided the honors with the dismal Savoyard, who ground away at his organ, and she brought a flicker of admiration into his bronzed and grimy face, for he played for her the same tune over and over, encouraging her with nods and bravas. She was enjoying her triumph quite as much as any prima donna who ever tripped it on a more ambitious stage.

Gordon recognized in the little dancer the tangled-haired child who had run away with the little girl's doll a few days before.

CHAPTER II

GENERAL KEITH BECOMES AN OVERSEER

WHEN the war closed, though it was not recognized at first, the old civilization of the South passed away. Fragments of the structure that had once risen so fair and imposing still stood for a time, even after the foundations were undermined: a bastion here, a tower there; but in time they followed the general overthrow, and crumbled gradually to their fall, leaving only ruins and decay.

For a time it was hoped that the dilapidation might be repaired and the old life be lived again. General Keith, like many others, though broken and wasted in body, undertook to rebuild with borrowed money, but with disastrous results. The conditions were all against him.

Three or four years' effort to repair his fallen fortunes only plunged him deeper in debt. General Keith, like most of his neighbors and friends, found himself facing the fact that he

was hopelessly insolvent. As soon as he saw he could not pay his debts he stopped spending and notified his creditors.

"I see nothing ahead of me," he wrote, "but greater ruin. I am like a horse in a quicksand: every effort I make but sinks me deeper."

Some of his neighbors took the benefit of the bankrupt law which was passed to give relief. General Keith was urged to do likewise, but he declined.

"Though I cannot pay my debts," he said, "the least I can do is to acknowledge that I owe them. I am unwilling to appear, even for a short time, to be denying what I know to be a fact."

He gave up everything that he owned, reserving nothing that would bring in money.

When Elphinstone was sold, it brought less than the debts on it. The old plate, with the Keith coat-of-arms on it, from which generations of guests had been served, and which old Richard, the butler, had saved during the war, went for its weight in silver. The library had been pillaged until little of it remained. The old Keith pictures, some of them by the best artists, which had been boxed and stored elsewhere until after the war, now went to the purchaser of the

place for less than the price of their frames. Among them was the portrait of the man in the steel coat and hat, who had the General's face.

What General Keith felt during this transition no one, perhaps, ever knew; certainly his son did not know it, and did not dream of it until later in life.

It was, however, not only in the South that fortunes were lost by the war. As vast as was the increase of riches at the North among those who stayed at home, it did not extend to those who took the field. Among these was a young officer named Huntington, from Brookford, a little town on the sunny slope that stretches eastwardly from the Alleghanies to the Delaware. Captain Huntington, having entered the army on the outbreak of the war, like Colonel Keith rose to the rank of general, and, like General Keith, received a wound that incapacitated him for service. His wife was a Southern woman, and had died abroad, just at the close of the war, leaving him a little girl, who was the idol of his heart. He was interested in the South, and came South to try and recuperate from the effects of his wound and of exposure during the war.

The handsomest place in the neighborhood

of Elphinstone was "Rosedale," the family-seat of the Berkeleys. Mr. Berkeley had been killed in the war, and the plantation went, like Elphinstone and most of the other old estates, for debt. And General Huntington purchased it.

As soon as General Keith heard of his arrival in the neighborhood, he called on him and invited him to stay at his house until Rosedale should be refurnished and made comfortable again. The two gentlemen soon became great friends, and though many of the neighbors looked askance at the Federal officer and grumbled at his possessing the old family-seat of the Berkeleys, the urbanity and real kindness of the dignified, soldierly young officer soon made his way easier and won him respect if not friendship. When a man had been a general at the age of twenty-six, it meant that he was a man, and when General Keith pronounced that he was a gentleman, it meant that he was a gentleman. Thus reasoned the neighbors.

His only child was a pretty little girl of five or six years, with great brown eyes, yellow curls, and a rosebud face that dimpled adorably when she laughed. When Gordon saw her he recognized her instantly as the tot who had given her doll to the little dancer two years before.

Her eyes could not be mistaken. She used to drive about in the tiniest of village carts, drawn by the most Liliputian of ponies, and Gordon used to call her "Cindy,"—short for Cinderella,—which amused and pleased her. She in turn called him her sweetheart; tyrannized over him, and finally declared that she was going to marry him.

"Why, you are not going to have a rebel for a sweetheart?" said her father.

"Yes, I am. I am going to make him Union," she declared gravely.

"Well, that is a good way. I fancy that is about the best system of Reconstruction that has yet been tried."

He told the story to General Keith, who rode over very soon afterwards to see the child, and thenceforth called her his fairy daughter.

One day she had a tiff with Gordon, and she announced to him that she was not going to kiss him any more.

"Oh, yes, you are," said he, teasing her.

"I am not." Her eyes flashed. And although he often teased her afterwards, and used to draw a circle on his cheek which, he said, was her especial reservation, she kept her word, even in

spite of the temptation which he held out to her to take her to ride if she would relent.

One Spring General Huntington's cough suddenly increased, and he began to go downhill so rapidly as to cause much uneasiness to his friends. General Keith urged him to go up to a little place on the side of the mountains which had been quite a health-resort before the war.

"Ridgely is one of the most salubrious places I know for such trouble as yours. And Dr. Theophilus Balsam is one of the best doctors in the State. He was my regimental surgeon during the war. He is a Northern man who came South before the war. I think he had an unfortunate love-affair."

"There is no place for such trouble as mine," said the younger man, gravely. "That bullet went a little too deep." Still, he went to Ridgely.

Under the charge of Dr. Balsam the young officer for a time revived, and for a year or two appeared on the way to recovery. Then suddenly his old trouble returned, and he went down as if shot. The name Huntington had strong association for the old physician; for it was a Huntington that Lois Brooke, the younger sister of Abigail Brooke, his old sweetheart, had

married, and Abigail Brooke's refusal to marry him had sent him South. The Doctor discovered early in his acquaintance with the young officer that he was Abigail Brooke's nephew. He, however, made no reference to his former relation to his patient's people.

Division bitterer than that war in which he had fought lay between them, the division that had embittered his life and made him an exile from his people. But the little girl with her great, serious eyes became the old physician's idol and tyrant, and how he worked over her father! Even in those last hours when the end had unexpectedly appeared, and General Huntington was making his last arrangements with the same courage which had made him a noted officer when hardly more than a boy, the Doctor kept his counsel almost to the end.

"How long have I to live, Doctor?" panted the dying man, when he rallied somewhat from the attack that had struck him down.

"Not very long."

"Then I wish you to send for General Keith. I wish him to take my child to my aunt, Miss Abigail Brooke."

"I will attend to it," said the Doctor.

"So long as she lives she will take care of her.

But she is now an old woman, and when she dies, God knows what will become of her."

"I will look after her as long as I live," said the Doctor.

"Thank you, Doctor." There was a pause. "She is a saint." His mind had gone back to his early life. To this Dr. Balsam made no reply. "She has had a sad life. She was crossed in love; but instead of souring, it sweetened her."

"I was the man," said the Doctor, quietly. "I will look after your child."

"You were! I never knew his name. She never married."

He gave a few directions, and presently said: "My little girl? I wish to see her. It cannot hurt me?"

"No, it will not hurt you," said the Doctor, quietly.

The child was brought, and the dying man's eyes lit up as they rested on her pink face and brown eyes filled with a vague wonder.

"You must remember papa."

She stood on tiptoe and, leaning over, kissed him.

"And you must go to Aunt Abby when I have gone."

"I will take Gordon Keith with me," said the child.

The ghost of a smile flickered about the dying man's eyes. Then came a fit of coughing, and when it had passed, his head, after a few gasps, sank back.

At a word from the Doctor, an attendant took the child out of the room.

That evening the old Doctor saw that the little girl was put to bed, and that night he sat up alone with the body. There were many others to relieve him, but he declined them and kept his vigil alone.

What memories were with him; what thoughts attended him through those lonely hours, who can tell!

General Keith went immediately to Ridgely on hearing of General Huntington's death. He took Gordon with him, thinking that he would help to comfort the little orphaned girl. The boy had no idea how well he was to know the watering-place in after years. The child fell to his care and clung to him, finally going to sleep in his arms. While the arrangements were being made, they moved for a day or two over to Squire Rawson's, the leading man of the Ridge region, where the squire's granddaughter, a

fresh-faced girl of ten or twelve years, took care of the little orphan and kept her interested.

The burial, in accordance with a wish expressed by General Huntington, took place in a corner of the little burying-ground at Ridgely, which lay on a sunny knoll overlooking the long slope to the northeastward. The child walked after the bier, holding fast to Gordon's hand, while Dr. Balsam and General Keith walked after them.

As soon as General Keith could hear from Miss Brooke he took the child to her; but to the last Lois said that she wanted Gordon to come with her.

Soon afterwards it appeared that General Huntington's property had nearly all gone. His plantation was sold.

Several times Lois wrote Gordon quaint little letters scrawled in a childish hand, asking about the calves and pigeons and chickens that had been her friends. But after a while the letters ceased to come.

When Elphinstone was sold, the purchaser was a certain Mr. Aaron Wickersham of New York, the father of Ferdy Wickersham, with whom Gordon had had the rock-battle. Mr. Wickersham was a stout and good-humored man

of fifty, with a head like a billiard-ball, and a face that was both shrewd and kindly. He had, during the war, made a fortune out of contracts, and was now preparing to increase it in the South, where the mountain region, filled with coal and iron, lay virgin for the first comer with sufficient courage and astuteness to take it. He found the new legislature of the State an instrument well fitted to his hands. It could be manipulated.

The Wickershams had lately moved into a large new house on Fifth Avenue, where Fashion was climbing the hill toward the Park in the effort to get above Murray Hill, and possibly to look down upon the substantial and somewhat prosaic mansions below, whose doors it had sometimes been found difficult to enter. Mrs. Wickersham was from Brookford, the same town from which the Huntingtons came, and when a young and handsome girl, having social ambitions, had married Aaron Wickersham when he was but a clerk in the banking-house of Wentworth & Son. And, be it said, she had aided him materially in advancing his fortunes. She was a handsome woman, and her social ambitions had grown. Ferdy was her only child, and was the joy and pride of her heart. Her

ambition centred in him. He should be the leader of the town, as she felt his beauty and his smartness entitled him to be. It was with this aim that she induced her husband to build the fine new house on the avenue. She knew the value of a large and handsome mansion in a fashionable quarter. Aaron Wickersham knew little of fashion; but he knew the power of money, and he had absolute confidence in his wife's ability. He would furnish the means and leave the rest to her. The house was built and furnished by contract, and Mrs. Wickersham took pride in the fact that it was much finer than the Wentworth mansion on Washington Square, and more expensive than the house of the Yorkes, which was one of the big houses on the avenue, and had been the talk of the town when it was built ten years before. Will Stirling, one of the wags, said that it was a good thing that Mr. Wickersham did not take the contract for himself.

Mr. Wickersham, having spent a considerable sum in planning and preparing his Southern enterprise, and having obtained a charter from the legislature of the State that gave him power to do almost anything he wished, suddenly found himself balked by the fact that the people in

the mountain region which he wished to reach with his road were so bitterly opposed to any such innovation that it jeopardized his entire scheme. From the richest man in that section, an old cattle-dealer and lumberman named Rawson, to Tim Gilsey, who drove the stage from Eden to Gumbolt Gap, they were all opposed to any "new-fangled" notions, and they regarded everything that came from carpet-baggers as "robbery and corruption."

He learned that "the most influential man down there" was General Keith, and that his place was for sale.

"I can reach him," said Mr. Wickersham, with a gleam in his eye. "I will have a rope around his neck that will lead him." So he bought the place.

Fortunately, perhaps, for Mr. Wickersham, he hinted something of his intentions to his counsel, a shrewd old lawyer of the State, who thought that he could arrange the matter better than Mr. Wickersham could.

"You don't know how to deal with these old fellows," he said.

"I know men," said Mr. Wickersham, "and I know that when I have a hold on a man—"

"You don't know General Keith," said Mr.

Bagge. The glint in his eye impressed the other and he yielded.

So Mr. Wickersham bought the Keith plantation and left it to Greene Bagge, Esq., to manage the business. Mr. Bagge wrote General Keith a diplomatic letter eulogistic of the South and of Mr. Wickersham's interest in it, and invited the General to remain on the place for the present as its manager.

General Keith sat for some time over that letter, his face as grave as it had ever been in battle. What swept before his mental vision who shall know? The history of two hundred years bound the Keiths to Elphinstone. They had carved it from the forest and had held it against the Indian. From there they had gone to the highest office of the State. Love, marriage, death—all the sanctities of life—were bound up with it. He talked it over with Gordon.

Gordon's face fell.

"Why, father, you will be nothing but an overseer."

General Keith smiled. Gordon remembered long afterwards, with shame for his speech, how wistful that smile was.

"Yes; I shall be something more than that.

I shall be, at least, a faithful one. I wish I could be as successful a one."

He wrote saying that, as he had failed for himself, he did not see how he could succeed for another. But upon receiving a very flattering reassurance, he accepted the offer. Thus, the General remained as an employé on the estate which had been renowned for generations as the home of the Keiths. And as agent for the new owner he farmed the place with far greater energy and success than he had ever shown on his own account. It was a bitter cup for Gordon to have his father act as an "overseer"; but if it contained any bitterness for General Keith, he never gave the least evidence of it, nor betrayed his feeling by the slightest sign.

When Mr. Wickersham visited his new estate he admitted that Mr. Bagge knew better than he how to deal with General Keith.

When he was met at the station by a tall, gray-haired gentleman who looked like something between a general and a churchwarden, he was inclined to be shy; but when the gentleman grasped his hand, and with a voice of unmistakable sincerity said he had driven out himself to meet him, to welcome him among them, he felt at home.

"It is gentlemen like yourself to whom we

must look for the preservation of our civilization,'' said General Keith, and introduced him personally to every man he met as, ''the gentleman who has bought my old place—not a 'carpet-bagger,' but a gentleman interested in the development of our country, sir.''

Mr. Wickersham, in fact, was treated with a distinction to which he had been a stranger during his former visits South. He liked it. He felt quite like a Southern gentleman, and with one or two Northerners whom he met held himself a little distantly.

Once or twice the new owner of Elphinstone came down with parties of friends—''to look at the country.'' They were interested in developing it, and had been getting sundry acts passed by the legislature with this in view. (General Keith's nose always took a slight elevation when the legislature was mentioned.) General Keith entertained the visitors precisely as he had done when he was the master, and Mr. Wickersham and his guests treated him, in the main, as if he were still the master. General Keith sat at the foot of the table opposite Mr. Wickersham, and directed the servants, who still called him ''Master,'' and obeyed him as such.

Mr. Wickersham conceived a great regard for

General Keith, not unmingled with a certain contempt for his inability to avail himself of the new conditions. "Fine old fellow," he said to his friends. "No more business-sense than a child. If he had he would go in with us and make money for himself instead of telling us how to make it." He did not know that General Keith would not have "gone in" with him in the plan he had carried through that legislature to save his life. But he honored the old fellow all the more. He had stood up for the General against Mrs. Wickersham, who hated all Keiths on Ferdy's account. The old General, who was as oblivious of this as a child, was always sending Mrs. Wickersham his regards.

"Perhaps, she might like to come down and see the place?" he suggested. "It is not what it used to be, but we can make her comfortable." His glance as it swept about him was full of affection.

Mr. Wickersham said he feared that Mrs. Wickersham's health would not permit her to come South.

"This is the very region for her," said the General. "There is a fine health-resort in the mountains, a short distance from us. I have been there, and it is in charge of an old friend

of mine, Dr. Balsam, one of the best doctors in the State. He was my regimental surgeon. I can recommend him. Bring her down, and let us see what we can do for her."

Mr. Wickersham thanked him with a smile. Time had been when Mrs. Wickersham had been content with small health-resorts. But that time was past. He did not tell General Keith that Mrs. Wickersham, remembering the fight between her son and Gordon, had consented to his buying the place from a not very noble motive, and vowed that she would never set her foot on it so long as a Keith remained there. He only assured the General that he would convey his invitation.

Mr. Wickersham's real interest, however, lay in the mountains to the westward. And General Keith gave him some valuable hints as to the deposits lying in the Ridge and the mountains beyond the Ridge.

"I will give you letters to the leading men in that region," he said. "The two most influential men up there are Dr. Balsam and Squire Rawson. They have, like Abraham and Lot, about divided up the country."

Mr. Wickersham's eyes glistened. He thanked him, and said that he might call on him.

Once there came near being a clash between Mr. Wickersham and General Keith. When Mr. Wickersham mentioned that he had invited a number of members of the legislature—"gentlemen interested in the development of the resources of the State"—to meet him, the General's face changed. There was a little tilting of the nose and a slight quivering of the nostrils. A moment later he spoke.

"I will have everything in readiness for your —f—for your guests; but I must ask you to excuse me from meeting them."

Mr. Wickersham turned to him in blank amazement.

"Why, General?"

The expression on the old gentleman's face answered him. He knew that at a word he should lose his agent, and he had use for him. He had plans that were far-reaching, and the General could be of great service to him.

When the statesmen arrived, everything on the place was in order; they were duly met at the station, and were welcomed at the house by the owner. Everything for their entertainment was prepared. Even the fresh mint was in the tankard on the old sideboard. Only the one who had made these preparations was absent.

Just before the vehicles were to return from the railway, General Keith walked into the room where Mr. Wickersham was lounging. He was booted and spurred for riding.

"Everything is in order for your guests, sir. Richard will see that they are looked after. These are the keys. Richard knows them all, and is entirely reliable. I will ask you to excuse me till—for a day or two."

Mr. Wickersham had been revolving in his mind what he should say to the old gentleman. He had about decided to speak very plainly to him on the folly of such narrowness. Something, however, in the General's air again deterred him: a thinning of the nostril; an unwonted firmness of the mouth. A sudden increase in the resemblance to the man-in-armor over the mantel struck him—a mingled pride and gravity. It removed him a hundred years from the present.

The keen-eyed capitalist liked the General, and in a way honored him greatly. His old-fashioned ideas entertained him. So what he said was said kindly. He regretted that the General could not stay; he "would have liked him to know his friends."

"They are not such bad fellows, after all.

Why, one of them is a preacher,'' he said jocularly as he walked to the door, ''and a very bright fellow. J. Quincy Plume is regarded as a man of great ability.''

''Yes, sir; I have heard of him. His doctrine is from the 'Wicked Bible'; he omits the 'not.' Good morning.'' And General Keith bowed himself out.

When the guests arrived, Mr. Wickersham admitted to himself that they were a strange lot of ''assorted statesmen.'' He was rather relieved that the General had not remained. When he looked about the table that evening, after the juleps were handed around and the champagne had followed, he was still more glad. The set of old Richard's head and the tilt of his nose were enough to face. An old and pampered hound in the presence of a pack of puppies could not have been more disdainful.

The preacher he had mentioned, Mr. J. Quincy Plume, was one of the youngest members of the party and one of the most striking—certainly one of the most convivial and least abashed. Mr. Plume had, to use his own expression, ''plucked a feather from many wings, and bathed his glistening pinions in the iridescent light of many orbs.'' He had been ''something

of a doctor''; then had become a preacher—to quote him again, ''not exactly of the gospel as it was understood by mossbacked theologians, of 'a creed outworn,' '' but rather the ''gospel of the new dispensation, of the new brotherhood—the gospel of liberty, equality, fraternity.'' Now he had found his true vocation, that of statesmanship, where he could practise what he had preached; could ''bask in the light of the effulgent sun of progress, and, shod with the sandals of Mercury, soar into a higher empyrean than he had yet attained.'' All of which, being translated, meant that Mr. Plume, having failed in several professions, was bent now on elevating himself by the votes of the ignorant followers whom he was cajoling into taking him as a leader.

Mr. Wickersham had had some dealing with him and had found him capable and ready for any job. When he had been in the house an hour Mr. Wickersham was delighted with him, and mentally decided to secure him for his agent. When he had been there a day Mr. Wickersham mentally questioned whether he had not better drop him out of his schemes altogether.

One curious thing was that each guest secretly warned him against all the others.

The prices were much higher than Mr. Wickersham had expected. But they were subject to scaling.

"Well, Richard, what do you think of the gentlemen?" asked Mr. Wickersham of the old servant, much amused at his disdain.

"What gent'mens?"

"Why, our guests." He used the possessive that the General used.

"Does you call dem 'gent'mens'?" demanded the old servant, fixing his eyes on him.

"Well, no; I don't think I do—all of them."

"Nor, suh; dee ain't gent'mens; dee's scalawags!" said Richard, with contempt. "I been livin' heah 'bout sixty years, I reckon, an' I never seen nobody like dem eat at de table an' sleep in de beds in dis house befo'."

When the statesmen were gone and General Keith had returned, old Richard gave Mr. Wickersham an exhibition of the manner in which a gentleman should be treated.

CHAPTER III

THE ENGINEER AND THE SQUIRE

MARIUS amid the ruins of Carthage is not an inspiring figure to us while we are young; it is Marius riding up the Via Sacra at the head of his resounding legions that then dazzles us. But as we grow older we see how much greater he was when, seated amid the ruins, he sent his scornful message to Rome. So, Gordon Keith, when a boy, thought being a gentleman a very easy and commonplace thing. He had known gentlemen all his life—had been bred among them. It was only later on, after he got out into the world, that he saw how fine and noble that old man was, sitting unmoved amid the wreck not only of his life and fortunes, but of his world.

General Keith was unable to raise even the small sum necessary to send the boy to college, but among the débris of the old home still remained the relics of a once choice library, and

General Keith became himself his son's instructor. It was a very irregular system of study, but the boy, without knowing it, was browsing in those pastures that remain ever fresh and green. There was nothing that related to science in any form.

"I know no more of science, sir, than an Indian," the General used to say. "The only sciences I ever thought I knew were politics and war, and I have failed in both."

He knew very little of the world—at least, of the modern world. Once, at table, Gordon was wishing that they had money.

"My son," said his father, quietly, "there are some things that gentlemen never discuss at table. Money is one of them." Such were his old-fashioned views.

It was fortunate for his son, then, that there came to the neighborhood about this time a small engineering party, sent down by Mr. Wickersham to make a preliminary survey for a railroad line up into the Ridge country above General Keith's home. The young engineer, Mr. Grinnell Rhodes, brought a letter to General Keith from Mr. Wickersham. He had sent his son down with the young man, and he asked that the General would look after him a little

and would render Mr. Rhodes any assistance in his power. The tall young engineer, with his clear eyes, pleasant voice, and quick ways, immediately ingratiated himself with both General Keith and Gordon. The sight of the instruments and, much more, the appearance of the young "chief," his knowledge of the world, and his dazzling authority as, clad in corduroy and buttoned in high yellow gaiters, he day after day strode forth with his little party and ran his lines, sending with a wave of his hand his rodmen to right or left across deep ravines and over eminences, awakened new ambitions in Gordon Keith's soul. The talk of building great bridges, of spanning mighty chasms, and of tunnelling mountains inspired the boy. What was Newton making his calculations from which to deduce his fundamental laws, or Galileo watching the stars from his Florentine tower? This young captain was Archimedes and Euclid, Newton and Galileo, all in one. He made them live.

It was a new world for Gordon. He suddenly awoke.

Both the engineer and Gordon could well have spared one of the engineer's assistants. Ferdy Wickersham had fulfilled the promise of his boy-

hood, and would have been very handsome but for an expression about the dark eyes which raised a question. He was popular with girls, but made few friends among men, and he and Mr. Rhodes had already clashed. Rhodes gave some order which Ferdy refused to obey. Rhodes turned on him a cold blue eye. "What did you say?"

"I guess this is my father's party; he's paying the freight, and I guess I am his son."

"I guess it's my party, and you'll do what I say or go home," said Mr. Rhodes, coldly. "Your father has no 'son' in this party. I have a rodman. Unless you are sick, you do your part of the work."

Ferdy submitted for reasons of his own; but his eyes lowered, and he did not forget Mr. Rhodes.

The two youngsters soon fell out. Ferdy began to give orders about the place, quite as if he were the master. The General cautioned Gordon not to mind what he said. "He has been spoiled a little; but don't mind him. An only child is at a great disadvantage." He spoke as if Gordon were one of a dozen children.

But Ferdy Wickersham misunderstood the other's concession. He resented the growing

intimacy between Rhodes and Gordon. He had discovered that Gordon was most sensitive about the old plantation, and he used his knowledge. And when Mr. Rhodes interposed it only gave the sport of teasing Gordon a new point.

One morning, when the three were together, Ferdy began, what he probably meant for banter, to laugh at Gordon for bragging about his plantation.

"You ought to have heard him, Mr. Rhodes, how he used to blow about it."

"I did not blow about it," said Gordon, flushing.

Rhodes, without looking up, moved in his seat uneasily.

"Ferdy, shut up—you bother me. I am working."

But Ferdy did not heed either this warning or the look on Gordon's face. His game had now a double zest: he could sting Gordon and worry Rhodes.

"I don't see why my old man was such a fool as to want such a dinged lonesome old place for, anyhow," he said, with a little laugh. "I am going to give it away when I get it."

Gordon's face whitened and flamed again, and his eyes began to snap.

"Then it's the only thing you ever would give away," said Mr. Rhodes, pointedly, without raising his eyes from his work.

Gordon took heart. "Why did you come down here if you feel that way about it?"

"Because my old man offered me five thousand if I'd come. You didn't think I'd come to this blanked old place for nothin', did you? Not much, sonny."

"Not if he knew you," said Mr. Rhodes, looking across at him. "If he knew you, he'd know you never did anything for nothing, Ferdy."

Ferdy flushed. "I guess I do it about as often as you do. I guess you struck my governor for a pretty big pile."

Mr. Rhodes's face hardened, and he fixed his eyes on him. "If I do, I work for it honestly. I don't make an agreement to work, and then play 'old soldier' on him."

"I guess you would if you did n't have to work."

"Well, I wouldn't," said Mr. Rhodes, firmly, "and I don't want to hear any more about it. If you won't work, then I want you to let me work."

Ferdy growled something under his breath about guessing that Mr. Rhodes was "working

to get Miss Harriet Creamer and her pile''; but if Mr. Rhodes heard him he took no notice of it, and Ferdy turned back to the boy.

Meantime, Gordon had been calculating. Five thousand dollars! Why, it was a fortune! It would have relieved his father, and maybe have saved the place. In his amazement he almost forgot his anger with the boy who could speak of such a sum so lightly.

Ferdy gave him a keen glance. ''What are you so huffy about, Keith?'' he demanded. ''I don't see that it's anything to you what I say about the place. You don't own it. I guess a man has a right to say what he chooses of his own.''

Gordon wheeled on him with blazing eyes, then turned around and walked abruptly away. He could scarcely keep back his tears. The other boy watched him nonchalantly, and then turned to Mr. Rhodes, who was glowering over his papers. ''I'll take him down a point or two. He's always blowing about his blamed old place as if he still owned it. He's worse than the old man, who is always blowing about 'before the war' and his grandfather and his old pictures. I can buy better ancestors on Broadway for twenty dollars.''

Mr. Rhodes gathered up his papers and rose to his feet.

"You could not make yourself as good a descendant for a million," he said, fastening his eye grimly on Ferdy.

"Oh, couldn't I? Well, I guess I could. I guess I am about as good as he is, or you either."

"Well, you can leave me out of the case," said Mr. Rhodes, sharply. "I will tell you that you are not as good as he, for he would never have said to you what you have said to him if your positions had been reversed."

"I don't understand you."

"I don't expect you do," said Mr. Rhodes. He stalked away. "I can't stand that boy. He makes me sick," he said to himself. "If I hadn't promised his governor to make him stick, I would shake him."

Ferdy was still smarting under Mr. Rhodes's biting sarcasm when the three came together again. He meant to be even with Rhodes, and he watched his opportunity.

Rhodes was a connection of the Wentworths, and had been helped at college by Norman's father, which Ferdy knew. One of the handsomest girls in their set, Miss Louise Caldwell,

was a cousin of Rhodes, and Norman was in love with her. Ferdy, who could never see any one succeeding without wishing to supplant him, had of late begun to fancy himself in love with her also, but Mr. Rhodes, he knew, was Norman's friend. He also knew that Norman was Mr. Rhodes's friend in a little affair which Mr. Rhodes was having with one of the leading belles of the town, Miss Harriet Creamer, the daughter of Nicholas Creamer of Creamer, Crustback & Company.

Ferdy had received that day a letter from his mother which stated that Louise Caldwell's mother was making a set at Norman for her daughter. Ferdy's jealousy was set on edge, and he now began to talk about Norman. Rhodes sniffed at the sneering mention of his name, and Gordon, whose face still wore a surly look, pricked up his ears.

"You need not always be cracking Norman up," said Wickersham to Rhodes. "You would not be if I were to tell you what I know about him. He is no better than anybody else."

"Oh, he is better than some, Ferdy," said Mr. Rhodes.

Gordon gave an appreciative grunt which drew Ferdy's eyes on him.

"You think so too, Keith, I suppose?" he said. "Well, you needn't. You need not be claiming to be such a friend of his. He is not so much of a friend of yours, I can tell you. I have heard him say as many mean things about you as any one."

It was Gordon's opportunity. He had been waiting for one.

"I don't believe it. I believe it's a lie," he declared, his face whitening as he gathered himself together. His eyes, which had been burning, had suddenly begun to blaze.

Mr. Rhodes looked up. He said nothing, but his eyes began to sparkle.

"You're a liar yourself," retorted Wickersham, turning red.

Gordon reached for him. "Take it back!" At the same moment Rhodes sprang and caught him, but not quite in time. The tip of Gordon's fingers as he slapped at Ferdy just reached the latter's cheek and left a red mark there.

"Take it back," he said again between his teeth as Rhodes flung his arm around him.

For answer Ferdy landed a straight blow in his face, making his nose bleed and his head ring.

"Take that!"

Gordon struggled to get free, but in vain. Rhodes with one arm swept Wickersham back. With the other he held Gordon in an iron grip. "Keep off, or I will let him go," he said.

The boy ceased writhing, and looked up into the young man's face. "You had just as well let me go. I am going to whip him. He has told a lie on my friend, who saved my life. And he's hit me. Let me go." He began to whimper.

"Now, look here, boys," said Rhodes; "you have got to stop right here and make up. I won't have this fighting."

"Let him go. I can whip him," said Ferdy, squaring himself, and adding an epithet.

Gordon was standing quite still. "I am going to fight him," he said, "and whip him. If he whips me, I am going to fight him again until I do whip him."

Mr. Rhodes's face wore a puzzled expression. He looked down at the sturdy face with its steady eyes, tightly gripped mouth, and chin which had suddenly grown squarer.

"If I let you go will you promise not to fight?"

"I will promise not to fight him here if he will come out behind the barn," said Gordon. "But

if he don't, I'm going to fight him here. I am going to fight him and I am going to whip him."

Mr. Rhodes considered. "If I go out there with you and let you have two rounds, will you make up and agree never to refer to the subject again?"

"Yes," said Wickersham.

"If I whip him," said Gordon.

"Come along with me. I will let you two boys try each other's mettle for two rounds, but, remember, you have got to stop when I call time."

So they came to a secluded spot, where the two boys took off their coats.

"Come, you fellows had better make up now," said Mr. Rhodes, standing above them good-humored and kindly.

"I don't see what we are fighting about," said Ferdy.

"Take back what you said about Norman," demanded Gordon.

"There is nothing to take back," declared Ferdy.

"Then take that!" said Gordon, stepping forward and tapping him in the mouth with the back of his hand.

He had not expected the other boy to be so quick. Before he could put himself on guard,

Ferdy had fired away, and catching him right in the eye, he sent him staggering back. He was up again in a second, however, and the next moment was at his opponent like a tiger. The rush was as unlooked for on Wickersham's part as Wickersham's blow had been by Gordon, and after a moment the lessons of Mike Doherty began to tell, and Gordon was ducking his head and dodging Wickersham's blows; and he began to drive him backward.

"By Jove! he knows his business," said Rhodes to himself.

Just then he showed that he knew his business, for, swinging out first with his right, he brought in the cut which was Mr. Doherty's *chef d'œuvre,* and catching Wickersham under the chin, he sent him flat on his back on the ground.

Mr. Rhodes called time and picked him up.

"Come, now, that's enough," he said.

Gordon wiped the blood from his face.

"He has got to take back what he said about Norman, or I have another round."

"You had better take it back, Ferdy. You began it," said the umpire.

"I didn't begin it. It's a lie!"

"You did," said Mr. Rhodes, coldly. He

turned to Gordon. "You have one more round."

"I take it back," growled Ferdy.

Just then there was a step on the grass, and General Keith stood beside them. His face was very grave as he chided the boys for fighting; but there was a gleam in his eyes that showed Mr. Rhodes and possibly the two combatants that he was not wholly displeased. At his instance and Mr. Rhodes's, the two boys shook hands and promised not to open the matter again.

As Wickersham continued to shirk the work of rodman, Rhodes took Gordon in his party, instructed him in the use of the instruments, and inspired him with enthusiasm for the work, none the less eager because he contrasted him with Ferdy. Rhodes knew what General Keith's name was worth, and he thought his son being of his party would be no hindrance to him.

The trouble came when he proposed to the General to pay Gordon for his work.

"He is worth no salary at present, sir," said the General. "I shall be delighted to have him go with you, and your instruction will more than compensate us."

The matter was finally settled by Rhodes declining positively to take Gordon except on his own terms. He needed an axeman and would pay him as such. He could not take him at all unless he were under his authority.

Mr. Rhodes was not mistaken. General Keith's name was one to conjure with. Squire Rawson was the principal man in all the Ridge region, and he had, as Rhodes knew, put himself on record as unalterably opposed to a railroad. He was a large, heavy man, deep-chested and big-limbed, with grizzled hair and beard, a mouth closer drawn than might have been expected in one with his surroundings, and eyes that were small and deep-set, but very keen. His two-storied white house, with wings and portico, though not large, was more pretentious than most of those in the section, and his whitewashed buildings, nestled amid the fruit-trees on a green hill looking up the valley to the Gap, made quite a settlement. He was a man of considerable property and also of great influence, and in the Ridge region, as elsewhere, wealth is a basis of position and influence. The difference is one of degree. The evidences of wealth in the Ridge country were land and cattle, and these Squire Rawson had in abundance. He was

esteemed the best judge of cattle in all that region.

Consistency is a jewel; but there are regions where Hospitality is reckoned before Consistency, and as soon as the old squire learned that General Keith's son was with the surveying party, even though it was, to use a common phrase, "comin' interferin' " with that country, he rode over to their camp and invited Gordon and his "friends" to be his guests as long as they should remain in that neighborhood.

"I don't want you to think, young man," he said to Rhodes, "that I'm goin' to agree to your dod-rotted road comin' through any land of mine, killin' my cattle; but I'll give you a bed and somethin' to eat."

Rhodes felt that he had gained a victory; Gordon was doubtful.

Though the squire never failed to remind the young engineer that the latter was a Yankee, and as such the natural and necessary enemy of the South, he and Rhodes became great friends, and the squire's hospitable roof remained the headquarters of the engineering party much longer than there was any necessity for its being so.

The squire's family consisted of his wife, a

kindly, bustling little old dame, who managed everything and everybody, including the squire, with a single exception. This was her granddaughter, Euphronia Tripper, a plump and fresh young girl with light hair, a fair skin, and bright eyes. The squire laid down the law to those about him, but Mrs. Rawson—"Elizy"—laid down the law for him. This the old fellow was ready enough to admit. Sometimes he had a comical gleam in his deep eyes when he turned them on his guests as he rose at her call of "Adam, I want you."

"Boys, learn to obey promptly," he said; "saves a sight o' trouble. It's better in the family 'n a melojeon. It's got to come sooner or later, and the sooner the better for you. The difference between me and most married men around here is that they lies about it, and I don't. I know I belongs to Eliza. She owns me, but then she treats me well. I'm sort o' meek when she's around, but then I make up for it by bein' so durned independent when I'm away from home. Besides, it's a good deal better to be ordered about by somebody as keers for you than not to have anybody in the world as keers whether you come or stay."

Besides Mrs. Rawson, there were in the fam-

ily a widowed daughter, Mrs. Tripper, a long, pale, thin woman, with sad eyes, who had once been pretty, and her daughter Euphronia, already referred to, who, in right of being very pretty, was the old squire's idol and was never thwarted in anything. She was, in consequence, a spoiled little damsel, self-willed, very vain, and as susceptible as a chameleon. The ease with which she could turn her family around her finger gave her a certain contempt for them. At first she was quite enamoured of the young engineer; but Mr. Rhodes was too busy to give any thought to a girl whom he regarded as a child, and she turned her glances on Gordon. Gordon also was impervious to her charms. He was by no means indifferent to girls; several little damsels who attended St. Martin's Church had at one time or another been his load-stars for a while; but he was an aristocrat at heart, and held himself infinitely above a girl like Miss Euphronia.

Ferdy Wickersham had no such motives for abstaining from a flirtation with the young girl as those which restrained Rhodes and Keith.

Euphronia had not at first taken much notice of him. She had been inclined to regard Ferdy Wickersham with some disfavor as a Yankee;

but when the other two failed her, Wickersham fell heir to her blandishments. Her indifference to him had piqued him and awakened an interest which possibly he might not otherwise have felt. He had seen much of the world for a youngster, and could make a good show with what he knew. He could play on the piano, and though the aged instrument which the old countryman had got at second-hand for his granddaughter gave forth sounds which might have come from a tinkling cymbal, yet Ferdy played with a certain dash and could bring from it tunes which the girl thought very fine. The two soon began to be so much together that both Rhodes and Keith fell to rallying Ferdy as to his conquest. Ferdy accepted it with complacency.

"I think I shall stay here while you are working up in the mountains," he said to his chief as the time drew near for them to leave.

"You will do nothing of the kind. I promised to take you with me, and I will take you dead or alive."

A frown began on the youngster's face, but passed away quickly, and in its place came a look of covert complacency.

"I thought your father had offered you five

thousand dollars if you would stick it out through the whole trip?'' Keith said.

Ferdy shut one eye slowly and gazed at Gordon with the other.

''Sickness was barred. I'll tell the old man I've studied. He'd never drop on to the game. He is a soft old bird, anyway.''

''Do you mean you are going to lie to him?'' asked Gordon.

''Oh, you are sappy! All fellows lie to their governors,'' declared Ferdy, easily. ''Why, I wouldn't have any fun at all if I did not lie. You stay with me a bit, my son, and I'll teach you a few useful things.''

''Thank you. I have no doubt you are a capable teacher,'' sniffed Gordon; ''but I think I won't trouble you.''

That evening, as Keith was coming from his work, he took a cross-cut through the fields and orchard, and under an overshadowing tree he came on Ferdy and Euphronia. They were so deeply engaged that Keith hastily withdrew and, making a detour, passed around the orchard to the house.

At supper Mrs. Tripper casually inquired of her daughter where she had been, a remark which might have escaped Keith's observation

had not Ferdy Wickersham answered it in some haste.

"She went after the cows," he said, with a quick look at her, "and I went fishing, but I did not catch anything."

"I thought, Phrony, I saw you in the orchard," said her mother.

Wickersham looked at her quickly again.

"No, she wasn't in the orchard," he said, "for I was there."

"No, I wasn't in the orchard this evening," said Euphronia. "I went after the cows." She looked down in her plate.

Keith ate the rest of his supper in silence. He could not tell on Ferdy; that would not be "square." He consulted his mentor, his chief, who simply laughed at him.

"Leave 'em alone," he counselled. "I guess she knew how to lie before he came. Ferdy has some sense. And we are going to leave for the mountains in a little while. I am only waiting to bring the old squire around."

Gordon shook his head.

"My father says you mistake his hospitality for yielding," he said. "You will never get him to consent to your plan."

Rhodes laughed.

"Oh, won't I! I have had these old countrymen to deal with before. Just give them time and show them the greenbacks. He will come around. Wait until I dangle the shekels before him."

But Mr. Rhodes found that in that provincial field there were some things stronger than shekels. And among these were prejudices. The more the young engineer talked, the more obstinate appeared the old countryman.

"I raise cattle," he said in final answer to all his eloquence.

"Raise cattle! You can make more by raising coal in one year than you can by raising cattle all your life. Why, you have the richest mineral country back here almost in the world," said the young diplomat, persuasively.

"And that's the reason I want to keep the railroads out," said the squire, puffing quietly. "I don't want the Yankees to come down and take it away from us."

Rhodes laughed. "I'd like to see any one take anything from you. They will develop it for you."

"I never seen anybody develop anything for another man, leastways a Yankee," said Squire Rawson, reflectively.

Just then Ferdy chipped in. He was tired of being left out.

"My father'll come down here and show you old mossbacks a thing or two," he laughed.

The old man turned his eyes on him slowly. Ferdy was not a favorite with him. For one thing, he played on the piano. But there were other reasons.

"Who is your father, son?" The squire drew a long whiff from his pipe.

"Aaron Wickersham of Wickersham & Company, who is setting up the chips for this railroad. We are going to run through here and make it one of the greatest lines of the country."

"Oh, you're *goin'* to run it! From the way you talked I thought maybe you *had* run it. Was a man named Aaron once thought he knew more 'bout runnin' a' expedition than his brother did. Ever heard what became of him?"

"No," said Ferdy.

"Well, he run some of 'em in the ground. He didn't have sense to know the difference between a calf and God."

Ferdy flushed.

"Well, my old man knows enough to run this railroad. He has run bigger things than this."

"If he knows as much as his son, he knows a lot. He ought to be able to run the world." And the squire turned back to Rhodes:

"What are you goin' to do, my son, when you've done all you say you're goin' to do for us? You will be too good to live among them Yankees; you will have to come back here, I reckon."

"No; I'm going to marry and settle down," said Rhodes, jestingly. "Maybe I'll come back here sometime just to receive your thanks for showing you how benighted you were before I came, and for the advice I gave you."

"He is trying to marry a rich woman," said Ferdy, at which Rhodes flushed a little.

The old man took no notice of the interruption.

"Well, you must," he said to Rhodes, his eyes resting on him benevolently. "You must come back sometime and see me. I love to hear a young man talk who knows it all. But you take my advice, my son; don't marry no rich man's daughter. They will always think they have done you a favor, and they will try to make you think so too, even if your wife don't do it. You take warnin' by me. When I married, I had just sixteen dollars and my wife she had seventeen,

and I give you my word I have never heard the last of that one dollar from that day to this."

Rhodes laughed and said he would remember his advice.

"Sometimes I think," said the old man, "I have mistaken my callin'. I was built to give advice to other folks, and instid of that they have been givin' me advice all my life. It's in and about the only thing I ever had given me, except physic."

The night before the party left, Ferdy packed his kit with the rest; but the next morning he was sick in his bed. His pulse was not quick, but he complained of pains in every limb. Dr. Balsam came over to see him, but could find nothing serious the matter. He, however, advised Rhodes to leave him behind. So, Ferdy stayed at Squire Rawson's all the time that the party was in the mountains. But he wrote his father that he was studying.

During the time that Rhodes's party was in the mountains Squire Rawson rode about with them examining lands, inspecting coal-beds, and adding much to the success of the undertaking.

He appeared to be interested mainly in hunting up cattle, and after he had introduced the engineers and secured the tardy consent of the

landowners for them to make a survey, he would spend hours haggling over a few head of mountain cattle, or riding around through the mountains looking for others.

Many a farmer who met the first advances of the stranger with stony opposition yielded amicably enough after old Rawson had spent an hour or two looking at his "cattle," or had conversed with him and his weather-beaten wife about the "craps" and the "child'en."

"You are a miracle!" declared young Rhodes, with sincere admiration. "How do you manage it?"

The old countryman accepted the compliment with becoming modesty.

"Oh, no; ain't no miracle about it. All I know I learned at the Ridge College, and from an old uncle of mine, and in the war. He used to say, 'Adam, don't be a fool; learn the difference between cattle.' Now, before you come I didn't know nothin' about all them fureign countries—they was sort of vague, like the New Jerusalem—or about coal. You've told me all about that. I had an idea that it was all made jest so, —jest as we find it,—as the Bible says 'twas; but you know a lot—more than Moses knowed, and he was 'skilled in all the learnin' of the

Egyptians.' You haven't taken to cattle quite as kindly as I'd 'a' liked, but you know a lot about coal. Learn the difference between cattle, my son. There's a sight o' difference between 'em.''

Rhodes declared that he would remember his advice, and the two parted with mutual esteem.

CHAPTER IV

TWO YOUNG MEN

THE young engineer, on his return to New York, made a report to his employer. He said that the mineral resources were simply enormous, and were lying in sight for any one to pick up who knew how to deal with the people to whom they belonged. They could be had almost for the asking. But he added this statement: that the legislative charters would hardly hold, and even if they did, it would take an army to maintain what they gave against the will of the people. He advised securing the services of Squire Rawson and a few other local magnates.

Mr. Wickersham frowned at this plain speaking, and dashed his pen through this part of the report. "I am much obliged to you for the report on the minerals. The rest of it is trash. You were not paid for your advice on that. When I want law I go to a lawyer."

Mr. Rhodes rose angrily.

"Well, you have for nothing an opinion that is worth more than that of every rascally politician that has sold you his opinion and himself, and you will find it out."

Mr. Wickersham did find it out. However much was published about it, the road was not built for years. The legislative charters, gotten through by Mr. J. Quincy Plume and his confrères, which were to turn that region into a modern Golconda, were swept away with the legislatures that created them, and new charters had to be obtained.

Squire Rawson, however, went on buying cattle and, report said, mineral rights, and Gordon Keith still followed doggedly the track along which Mr. Rhodes had passed, sure that sometime he should find him a great man, building bridges and cutting tunnels, commanding others and sending them to right or left with a swift wave of his arm as of old. Where before Gordon studied as a task, he now worked for ambition, and that key unlocked unknown treasures.

Mr. Rhodes fell in with Norman just after his interview with Mr. Wickersham. He was still feeling sore over Mr. Wickersham's treatment of his report. He had worked hard over it. He

attributed it in part to Ferdy's complaint of him. He now gave Norman an account of his trip, and casually mentioned his meeting Gordon Keith.

"He's a good boy," he said, "a nice kid. He licked Ferdy—a very pretty little piece of work. Ferdy had both the weight and the reach on him."

"Licked Ferdy! It's an old grudge, I guess?" said Norman.

"No. They started in pretty good friends. It was about you."

"About me?" Norman's face took on new interest.

"Yes; Ferdy said something, and Keith took it up. He seems pretty fond of you. I think he had it in for Ferdy, for Ferdy had been bedevilling him about the place. You know old Wickersham owns it. Ferdy's strong point is not taste. So I think Gordon was feeling a bit sore, and when Ferdy lit into you, Keith slapped him."

Norman was all alert now.

"Well? Which licked?"

"Oh, that was all. Keith won at the end of the first round. He'd have been fighting now if he had not licked him."

The rest of the talk was of General Keith and of the hardship of his position.

"They are as poor as death," said Rhodes. He told of his surroundings.

When Norman got home, he went to his mother. Her eye lighted up as it rested on the alert, vigorous figure and fresh, manly, eager face. She knew he had something on his mind.

"Mother, I have a plan," he said. "You remember Gordon Keith, the boy whose boat I sank over in England—'Keith the rebel'?"

Mrs. Wentworth remembered well. She remembered an older fight than that, between a Keith and a Wentworth.

"Well, I have just heard of him. Rhodes—you remember Rhodes? Grinnell Rhodes? Used to be stroke, the greatest stroke ever was. Well, Rhodes has been down South and stayed at Keith's father's home. He says it's a beautiful old place, and now belongs to Mr. Wickersham, Ferdy's father, and the old gentleman, General Keith, who used to own it farms it for him. Think of that! It's as if father had to be a bookkeeper in the bank! Rhodes says he's a fine old fellow, and that Gordon is one of the best. He was down there running a railway line for Mr. Wickersham, and took Gordon with

him. And he says he's the finest sort of a fellow, and wants to go to college dreadfully, but hasn't a cent nor any way to get anything. Rhodes says it's awful down there. They are so poor." Mrs. Wentworth smiled. "Well?"

Norman blushed and stammered a little, as he often did when he was embarrassed.

"Well, you know I have some money of my own, and I thought if you don't mind it I'd like to lend him a little. I feel rather piggish just spending it right and left for nothing, when a fellow like that would give his eyes for the chance to go to college. Grinnell Rhodes says that he is ever so fond of me; that Ferdy was blowing once and said something against me, and Gordon jumped right into him—said I was a friend of his, and that Ferdy should not say anything against me in his presence. He knocked Ferdy down. I tell you, when a fellow is ready to fight for another years after he has seen him, he is a good friend."

Mrs. Wentworth's face showed that she too appreciated such a friend.

"How do you know he needs it, or would accept it if he did?"

"Why, Rhodes says we have no idea of the poverty down there. He says our poorest clerks

are rich compared with those people. And I'll write him a letter and offer to lend it to him. I'll tell him it's mine."

Mrs. Wentworth went over and kissed the boy. The picture rose to her mind of a young man fresh from fields where he had won renown, honored by his State, with everything that wealth and rank could give, laying his honors at the feet of a poor young girl.

"All right, my son."

That night Norman sat down and wrote a letter.

A few days later than this, Gordon Keith received a letter with the post-mark "New York." Who was there in New York who could know him? Not his young engineer. He knew his hand. He was now abroad. As he read the letter he wondered yet more. It was from Norman Wentworth. He had met an old friend, he said, who had told him about Gordon and about his father's misfortunes. He himself, he said, was at college, and he found himself in a position to be able to help a friend. He did not know to what extent aid might be of service; but he had some means of his own, and he asked that Gordon would allow him to make him a loan of

whatever might be necessary to relieve his father and himself.

When Gordon finished reading the letter there were tears in his eyes.

He laid the letter in his father's lap, and the old gentleman read it through slowly. He sat lost in reflection for a few moments and then handed the letter back to Gordon.

"Write to him and thank him, my son—thank him warmly for both of us. I will never forget his kindness. He is a gentleman."

This was all; but he too showed in his face that that far-off shaft of light had reached his heart and rested there.

The General afterwards meditated deeply as to the wisdom of this action. Just then, however, Providence seemed to come to his aid.

Old Adam Rawson, hearing that he was hard up, or moved by some kindly impulse, offered to make him a loan. He "happened to have," he wrote, "a little pile lying by that he didn't have any particular use for just then, and it had come to him that, maybe, the General might be able to use it to advantage. He didn't care anything about security or interest."

The General was perplexed. He did not need it himself, but he was glad to borrow enough to

send Gordon to college for a year. He sent Gordon up to old Rawson's with a letter.

The old man read the letter and then looked Gordon over; he read it and looked him over again, much as if he were appraising a young steer.

"Well, I didn't say I'd lend it to you," he said; "but, maybe, I'll do it if 'twill help the General. Investin' in a young man is kind of hazardous; it's like puttin' your money in a harry-dick—you don't know what he's goin' to be. All you has to go on is the frame and your jedgment."

Fortunately for Keith, the old cattle-dealer had a good opinion of his "jedgment." He went on: "But I admit blood counts for somethin', and I'm half minded to adventure some on your blood."

Gordon laughed. He would be glad to be tried on any account, he said, and would certainly repay the money.

"Well, I b'lieve you will if you can," said the squire. "And that's more than I can say of everybody. I'll invest a leetle money in your future, and I want to say this to you, that your future will depend on whether you pay it back or not. I never seen a young man as didn't

pay his debts come to any good in my life, and I never seen one as did as didn't. I've seen many a man 'd shoot you if you dared to question his honor, an' wouldn't pay you a dollar if he was lousy with 'em." He took out his wallet, and untying the strings carefully, began to count out the greenbacks.

"I have to carry a pretty good pile to buy calves with," he chuckled; "but I reckon you'll be a fair substitute for one or two. How much do you want?—I mean, how little can you git along with?"

Gordon told him the amount his father had suggested. It was not a great sum.

"That seems a heap of money to put in book-learnin'," said the old man, thoughtfully, his eyes fixed on Gordon. "My whole edication didn't cost twenty-five dollars. With all that learnin', you'd know enough to teach the Ridge College."

Gordon, who had figured it out, began to give his necessary expenses. When he had finished, the old man counted out his bills. Gordon said he would give him his note for it, and his father would endorse it. The other shook his head.

"No; I don't want any bond. I'll remember it and you'll remember it. I've known too

many men think they'd paid a debt when they'd given their bond. I don't want you to think that. If you're goin' to pay me, you'll do it without a bond, and if you ain't, I ain't goin' to sue you; I'm jest goin' to think what a' o'nery cuss you are."

So Gordon returned home, and a few weeks later was delving deep into new mysteries.

Gordon's college life may be passed over. He worked well, for he felt that it was necessary to work.

Looking around when he left college, the only thing that appeared in sight for Gordon Keith was to teach school. To be sure, the business, "the universal refuge of educated indigents," as his father quoted with a smile, was already overcrowded. But Gordon heard of a school which up to this time had not been overwhelmed with applicants. There was a vacancy at the Ridge College. Finally poor Gunn, after holding out as long as he could, had laid down his arms, as all soldiers must do sooner or later, and Gordon applied for the position. The old squire remembered the straight, broad-shouldered boy with his father's eyes and also remembered the debt he owed him, and with the

vision of a stern-faced man with eyes of flame riding quietly at the head of his men across a shell-ploughed field, he wrote to Gordon to come.

"If he's got half of his daddy in him he'll straighten 'em out," he said.

So, Gordon became a school-teacher.

"I know no better advice to give you," said General Keith to Gordon, on bidding him good-by, "than to tell you to govern yourself, and you will be able to govern them. 'He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.' "

During the years in which Gordon Keith was striving to obtain an education as best he might, Ferdy Wickersham had gone to one of the first colleges of the land. It was the same college which Norman Wentworth was attending. Indeed, Norman's being there was the main reason that Ferdy was sent there. Mr. Wickersham wished his son to have the best advantages. Mrs. Wickersham desired this too, but she also had a further motive. She wished her son to eclipse Norman Wentworth. Both were young men of parts, and as both had unlimited means at their disposal, neither was obliged to study.

Norman Wentworth, however, had applied himself to secure one of the high class-honors,

and as he was universally respected and very popular, he was regarded as certain to have it, until an unexpected claimant suddenly appeared as a rival.

Ferdy Wickersham never took the trouble to compete for anything until he discovered that some one else valued it. It was a trait he had inherited from his mother, who could never see any one possessing a thing without coveting it.

The young man was soon known at college as one of the leaders of the gay set. His luxuriously furnished rooms, his expensive suppers and his acquaintance with dancing-girls were talked about, and he soon had a reputation for being one of the wildest youngsters of his class.

"Your son will spend all the money you can make for him," said one of his friends to Mr. Wickersham.

"Well," said the father, "I hope he will have as much pleasure in spending it as I have had in making it, that's all."

He not only gave Ferdy all the money he suggested a need for, but he offered him large bonuses in case he should secure any of the honors he had heard of as the prizes of the collegiate work.

Mrs. Wickersham was very eager for him to win this particular prize. Apart from her natural ambition, she had a special reason. The firm of Norman Wentworth & Son was one of the oldest and best-known houses in the country. The home of Norman Wentworth was known to be one of the most elegant in the city, as it was the most exclusive, and both Mr. and Mrs. Wentworth were recognized as representatives of the old-time gentry. Mrs. Wickersham might have endured the praise of the elegance of the mansion. She had her own ideas as to house-furnishing, and the Wentworth mansion was furnished in a style too quiet and antiquated to suit her more modern tastes. If it was filled with old mahogany and hung with damask-satin, Mrs. Wickersham had carved walnut and gorgeous hangings. And as to those white marble busts, and those books that were everywhere, she much preferred her brilliant figures which she "had bought in Europe," and books were "a nuisance about a house." They ought to be kept in a library, as she kept hers—in a carved-walnut case with glass doors.

The real cause of Mrs. Wickersham's dislike of Mrs. Wentworth lay deeper.

The elder lady had always been gracious to

Mrs. Wickersham when they met, as she was gracious to every one, and when a very large entertainment was given by her, had invited Mrs. Wickersham to it. But Mrs. Wickersham felt that Mrs. Wentworth lived within a charmed circle. And Mrs. Wickersham was envious.

It must be said that Ferdy needed no instigation to supersede Norman in any way that did not require too much work. He and Norman were very good friends; certainly Norman thought so; but at bottom Ferdy was envious of Norman's position and prestige, and deep in his heart lurked a long-standing grudge against the older boy, to which was added of late a greater one. Norman and he fancied the same girl, and Louise Caldwell was beginning to favor Norman.

Ferdy announced to his father that the class-honor would be won if he would give him money enough, and the elder Wickersham, delighted, told him to draw on him for all the money he wanted. This Ferdy did promptly. He suddenly gave up running away from college, applied himself to cultivating the acquaintance of his fellow-students, spent his money lavishly in entertainments, and for a time it appeared that he might wrest the prize from Norman's grasp.

College boys, however, are a curious folk. The mind of youth is virtuous. It is later on in life that it becomes sordid. Ferdy wrote his father that he had the prize, and that Norman, his only rival, had given up the fight. Mrs. Wickersham openly boasted of her son's success and of her motive, and sent him money lavishly. Young Wickersham's ambition, however, like that of many another man, o'erleaped itself. Wickersham drew about him many companions, but they were mainly men of light weight, roisterers and loafers, whilst the better class of his fellow-students quickly awoke to a true realization of the case. A new element was being introduced into college politics. The recognition of danger was enough to set the best element in the college to meet it. At the moment when Ferdy Wickersham felt himself victor, and abandoned himself to fresh pleasures, a new and irresistible force unexpectedly arose which changed the fate of the day. Wickersham tried to stem the current, but in vain. It was a tidal wave. Ferdy Wickersham faced defeat, and he could not stand it. He suddenly abandoned college, and went off, it was said, with a coryphée. His father and mother did not know of it for some time after he had left.

Mr. Wickersham received the first intimation of it in the shape of a draft which came to him from some distant point. When Mrs. Wickersham learned of it, she fell into a consuming rage, and then took to her bed. The downfall of her hopes and of her ambition had come through the person she loved best on earth. Finally she became so ill that Mr. Wickersham telegraphed a peremptory order to his son to come home, and after a reasonable time the young man appeared.

His mother's joy at meeting him overshadowed everything else with her, and the prodigal was received by her with that forgiveness which is both the weakness and the strength of a mother's heart. The father, however, had been struck as deeply as the mother. His ambition, if of a different kind, had been quite as great as that of Mrs. Wickersham, and the hard-headed, keen-sighted man, who had spent his life fighting his way to the front, often with little consideration for the rights of others, felt that one of his motives and one of his rewards had perished together.

The interview that took place in his office between him and his son was one which left its visible stamp on the older man, and for a time

appeared to have had an effect even on the younger, with all his insolence and impervious selfishness. When Aaron Wickersham unlocked his private door and allowed his son and heir to go out, the clerks in the outer office knew by the young man's face, quite as well as by the rumbles of thunder which had come through the fast-closed door, that the "old man" had been giving the young one a piece of his mind.

At first the younger man had been inclined to rebel; but for once in his life he found that he had passed the limit of license, and his father, whom he had rather despised as foolishly pliable, was unexpectedly his master. He laid before Ferdy, with a power which the latter could not but acknowledge, the selfishness and brutality of his conduct since he was a boy. He told him of his own earlier privations, of his labors, of his ambitions.

"I have worked my heart out," he said, "for your mother and for you. I have never known a moment of rest or of what you call 'fun.' I set it before me when your mother promised to marry me that I would make her as good as the first lady in the land—that is, in New York. She should have as big a house and as fine a carriage and as handsome frocks as any one of

them—as old Mrs. Wentworth or old Mrs. Brooke of Brookford, who were the biggest people I ever knew. And I have spent my life for it. I have grown old before my time. I have gotten so that things have lost their taste to me; I have done things that I never dreamed I would do to accomplish it. I have lost the power to sleep working for it, and when you came I thought I would have my reward in you. I have not only never stinted you, but I have lavished money on you as if I was the richest man in New York. I wanted you to have advantages that I never had: as good as Norman Wentworth or any one else. I have given you things, and seen you throw them away, that I would have crawled on my knees from my old home to this office to get when I was a boy. And I thought you were going to be my pride and my stay and my reward. And you said you were doing it, and your mother and I had staked our hearts on you. And all the time you were running away and lying to me and to her, and not doing one honest lick of work."

The young man interrupted him. "That is not so," he said surlily.

His father pulled out a drawer and took from it a letter. Spreading it open on his desk, he

laid the palm of his open hand on it. "Not so? I have got the proof of it here." He looked at the young man with level eyes, eyes in which was such a cold gleam that Ferdy's gaze fell.

"I did not expect you to do it for *me*," Aaron Wickersham went on slowly, never taking his eyes from his son's face, "for I had discovered that you did not care a button for my wishes; but I did think you would do it for your mother. For she thought you were a god and worshipped you. She has been talking for ten years of the time when she would go to see you come out at the head of your class. She was going to Paris to get the clothes to wear if you won, and you—" His voice broke—"you won't even graduate! What will you think next summer when Mrs. Wentworth is there to see her son, and all the other men and women I know who have sons who graduate there, and your mother—?" The father's voice broke completely, and he looked away. Even Ferdy for a moment seemed grave and regretful. Then after a glance at his father he recovered his composure.

"I'm not to blame," he said surlily, "if she did. It was her fault."

Aaron Wickersham turned on him.

"Stop," he said in a quiet voice. "Not another word. One other word, and, by God! I'll box your head off your shoulders. Say what you please about me, but not one word against her. I will take you from college and put you to sweeping the floor of this office at twenty dollars a month, and make you live on your salary, too, or starve, if you say one other word."

Ferdy's face blanched at the implacable anger that blazed in his father's eyes, but even more at the coldness of the gleam. It made him shiver.

A little later young Wickersham entered his father's office, and though he was not much liked by the older clerks, it soon appeared that he had found a congenial occupation and one for which he had a natural gift. For the first time in his life he appeared inclined to work.

CHAPTER V

THE RIDGE COLLEGE

THE school over which Gordon had undertaken to preside was not a very advanced seminary of learning, and possibly the young teacher did not impart to his pupils a great deal of erudition.

His predecessors in the schoolmaster's chair had been, like their patrons, the product of a system hardly less conservative than that of the Locrians. Any one who proposed an innovation would have done so with a rope about his neck, and woe to him if it proved unsuccessful.

When Gordon reported first to the squire, the old man was manifestly pleased.

"Why, you've growed considerable. I didn't have no idea you'd be so big a man." He measured him with satisfaction. "You must be nigh as big as your pa."

"I'm broader across the shoulders, but not so tall," said the young man.

"He is a pretty tall man," said the squire,

slowly, with the light of reflection in his eye. "You're a-goin' to try the Ridge College, are you?" He had a quizzical twinkle in his eye as it rested on the younger man's face.

"I 'm going to try it." And Gordon's face lit up. "I don't know much, but I'll do the best I can."

His modesty pleased the other.

"You know more than Jake Dennison, I reckon, except about devilment. I was afred you mightn't be quite up to the place here; you was rather young when I seen you last." He measured him as he might have done a young bullock.

"Oh, I fancy I shall be," interrupted the young man, flushing at the suggestion.

"You've got to learn them Dennison boys, and them Dennison boys is pretty hard to learn anything. You will need all the grit you've got."

"Oh, I'll teach them," asserted Gordon, confidently.

The old man's eye rested on him.

"'Tain't *teachin'* I'm a-talkin' about. It's *learnin'* I'm tellin' you they need. You've got to learn 'em a good deal, or they'll learn you. Them Dennison boys is pretty slow at learnin'."

The young man intimated that he thought he was equal to it.

"Well, we'll see," grunted the old fellow, with something very like a twinkle in his deep eyes. "Not as they'll do you any harm without you undertake to interfere with them," he drawled. "But you're pretty young to manage 'em jest so; you ain't quite big enough either, and you're too big to git in through the cat-hole. And I allow that you don't stand no particular show after the first week or so of gittin' into the house any other way."

"I'll get in, though, and I won't go in through the cat-hole either. I'll promise you that, if you'll sustain me."

"Oh, I'll sustain you," drawled the squire. "I'll sustain you in anything you do, except to pizon 'em with *slow* pizon, and I ain't altogether sure that wouldn' be jest manslaughter."

"All right." Keith's eyes snapped, and presently, as the older man's gaze rested on him, his snapped also.

So the compact was struck, and the trustee went on to give further information.

"Your hours will be as usual," said he: "from seven to two and fo' to six in summer, and half-past seven to two and three to five in winter, and

you'll find all the books necessary in the bookchist. We had to have 'em locked up to keep 'em away from the rats and the dirt-daubers. Some of 'em's right smartly de-faced, but I reckon you'll git on with 'em all right."

"Well, those are pretty long hours," said Gordon. "Seems to me they had better be shortened. I shall—"

"Them's the usual hours," interrupted the old man, positively. "I've been trustee now for goin' on twenty-six year, an' th'ain't never been any change in 'em. An' I ain't see as they've ever been too long—leastways, I never see as the scholars ever learned too much in 'em. They ain't no longer than a man has to work in the field, and the work's easier."

Gordon looked at the old man keenly. It was his first battle, and it had come on at once, as his father had warned him. The struggle was bitter, if brief, but he conquered—conquered himself. The old countryman's face had hardened.

"If you want to give satisfaction you'd better try to learn them scholars an' not the trustees," he said dryly. "The Dennison boys is hard, but we're harder."

Gordon looked at him quickly. His eyes were resting on him, and had a little twinkle in them.

"We're a little like the old fellow 'at told the young preacher 'at he'd better stick to abusin' the sins of Esau and Jacob and David and Peter, an' let the sins o' that congregation alone."

"I'll try and give you satisfaction," said Keith.

The squire appeared pleased. His face relaxed and his tone changed.

"*You* won't have no trouble," he said good-humoredly. "Not if you're like your father. I told 'em you was his son, an' I'd be responsible for you."

Gordon Keith looked at him with softened eyes. A mention of his father always went to his heart.

"I'll try and give you satisfaction," he said earnestly. "Will you do me a favor?"

"Yes."

"Will you come over to the examination of the school when it opens, and then let me try the experiment of running it my way for, say, two months, and then come to another examination? Then if I do not satisfy you I'll do anything you say; I'll go back to the old way."

"Done," said the trustee, cordially. And so, Gordon Keith won another victory, and started the school under favorable auspices.

Adam Rawson asked him to come and live at his house. "You might give Phrony a few extra lessons to fit her for a bo'din'-school," he said. "I want her to have the best edvantages."

Keith soon ingratiated himself further with the old squire. He broke his young horses for him, drove his wagon, mended his vehicles, and was ready to turn his hand to anything that came up about the place.

As his confidence in the young man grew, the squire let Keith into a secret.

"You mind when you come up here with that young man from the North,—that engineer fellow,—what come a-runnin' of a railroad a-hell-bulgin' through this country, and was a-goin' to carry off all the coal from the top of the Alleghanies spang down to Torment?" Keith remembered. "Well, he was right persuasive," continued the squire, "and I thought if all that money was a-goin' to be made and them railroads had to come, like he said, jest as certain as water runnin' down a hill, I might as well git some of it. I had a little slipe or two up there before, and havin' a little money from my cattle, lumber, and sich, I went in and bought a few slipes more, jest to kind of fill in like, and Phrony's growin' up, and I'm a-thinkin' it is

about time to let the railroads come in; so, if you kin git your young man, let him know I've kind o' changed my mind."

Miss Euphronia Tripper had grown up into a plump and pretty country girl of fifteen or sixteen, whose rosy cheeks, flaxen hair, and blue eyes, as well as the fact that she was the only heiress of the old squire, who was one of the "best-fixed" men in all that "country," made her quite the belle of the region. She had already made a deep impression on both big Jake Dennison and his younger brother Dave. Dave was secretly in love with her, but Jake was openly so, a condition which he manifested by being as plainly and as hopelessly bound in her presence as a bear cub tangled in a net. For her benefit he would show feats of strength which might have done credit to a boy-Hercules; but let her turn on him the glow of her countenance, and he was a hopeless mass of perspiring idiocy.

Keith found her a somewhat difficult pupil to deal with. She was much more intent on making an impression on him than on progressing in her studies.

After the first shyness of her intercourse with

the young teacher had worn off, she began for a while rather to make eyes at him, which if Keith ever dreamed of, he never gave the least sign of it. She, therefore, soon abandoned the useless campaign, and for a time held him in mingled awe and disdain.

The Ridge College was a simple log-building of a single room, with a small porch in front, built of hewn logs and plastered inside.

Gordon Keith, on entering on his new duties, found his position much easier than he had been led to expect.

Whether it was the novelty of the young teacher's quiet manner, clear eyes, broad shoulders, and assured bearing, or the idea of the examination with which he undertook to begin the session, he had a week of surprising quiet. The school filled day after day, and even the noted Dennison boys, from Jacob Dennison, the strapping six-foot senior, down to Dave, who was the youngest and smartest of the three, appeared duly every morning, and treated the young teacher with reasonable civility, if with somewhat insolent familiarity.

The day of the examination Squire Rawson attended, solemn and pompous with a superfluity of white shirt-front.

Brief as was the examination, it revealed to Keith an astonishing state of ignorance of the simplest things. It was incredible to him that, with so many hours of so-called study, so little progress had been made. He stated this in plain language, and outlined his plan for shorter hours and closer application. A voice from the boys' side muttered that the owner did not see anything the matter with the old hours. They were good enough for them. Keith turned quickly:

"What is that?"

There was no answer.

"What is that, Dennison?" he demanded. "I thought I heard you speak."

"Wall, if you did, I warn't speakin' to you," said Jacob Dennison, surlily.

"Well, when you speak in school, address yourself to me," said Keith. He caught Euphronia Tripper's eyes on him.

"I mought an' I moughtn't," said Jacob, insolently.

"I propose to see that you do."

Jacob's reply was something between a grunt and a sneer, and the school rustled with a sound very much like applause.

Next morning, on his arrival at school, Keith

found the door fastened on the inside. A titter from within revealed the fact that it was no accident, and the guffaw of derision that greeted his sharp command that the door should be opened immediately showed that the Dennison boys were up to their old tricks.

"Open the door, Jake Dennison, instantly!" he called.

The reply was sung through the keyhole:

"'Ole Molly hyah, what you doin' dyah?
Settin' in de cordner, smokin' a ciggyah.'"

It was little Dave's voice, and was followed by a puff of tobacco smoke through the keyhole and a burst of laughter led by Phrony Tripper.

An axe was lying at the woodpile near by, and in two minutes the door was lying in splinters on the school-house floor, and Keith, with a white face and a dangerous tremble in his voice, was calling the amazed school to order. He heard the lessons through, and at noon, the hour he had named the day before, dismissed all the younger scholars. The Dennisons and one or two larger boys he ordered to remain. As the scholars filed out, there was a colloquy between Jacob Dennison and his younger brother Dave. Dave had the brains of the family, and he was

whispering to Jake. Keith moved his chair and seated himself near the door. There was a brief muttered conversation among the Dennisons, and then Jake Dennison rose, put on his hat slowly, and, addressing the other boys, announced that he didn't know what they were going to do, but he was "a-gwine home and git ready to go and see the dance up at Gates's."

He swaggered toward the door, the others following in his wake.

Keith rose from his seat.

"Go back to your places." He spoke so quietly that his voice could scarcely be heard.

"Go nowhere! You go to h—l!" sneered the big leader, contemptuously. "'Tain't no use for you to try to stop me—I kin git away with two like you."

Perhaps he could have done so, but Keith was too quick for him. He seized the split-bottomed chair from which he had risen, and whirling it high above his head, brought it crashing down on his assailant, laying him flat on the floor. Then, without a second's hesitation, he sprang toward the others.

"Into your seats instantly!" he shouted, as he raised once more the damaged, but still for-

"If you don't go to your seat I'll 'ash your brains out," said Keith.

midable, weapon. By an instinct the mutineers fell into the nearest seats, and Keith turned back to his first opponent, who was just rising from the floor with a dazed look on his face. A few drops of blood were trickling down his forehead.

"If you don't go to your seat instantly, I'll dash your brains out," said Keith, looking him full in the eye. He still grasped the chair, and as he tightened his grip on it, the crestfallen bully sank down on the bench and broke into a whimper about a grown man hitting a boy with a chair.

Suddenly Keith, in the moment of victory, found himself attacked in the rear. One of the smaller boys, who had gone out with the rest, hearing the fight, had rushed back, and, just as Keith drove Jake Dennison to his seat, sprang on him like a little wild-cat. Turning, Keith seized and held him.

"What are you doing, Dave Dennison, confound you?" he demanded angrily.

"I'm one of 'em," blubbered the boy, trying to reach him with both fist and foot. "I don't let nobody hit my brother."

Keith found that he had more trouble in quelling Dave, the smallest member of the Den-

nison tribe, than in conquering the bigger brothers.

"Sit down and behave yourself," he said, shoving him into a seat and holding him there. "I'm not going to hit him again if he behaves himself."

Keith, having quieted Dave, looked to see that Jake was not much hurt. He took out his handkerchief.

"Take that and wipe your face with it," he said quietly, and taking from his desk his inkstand and some writing-paper, he seated himself on a bench near the door and began to write letters. It grew late, but the young teacher did not move. He wrote letter after letter. It began to grow dark; he simply lit the little lamp on his desk, and taking up a book, settled down to read; and when at last he rose and announced that the culprits might go home, the wheezy strains of the three instruments that composed the band at Gates's had long since died out, and Gordon Keith was undisputed master of Ridge College.

His letter to the trustees was delivered that morning, saying that if they would sustain his action he would do his best to make the school the best in that section; but if not, his resignation was in their hands.

"I guess he is the sort of medicine those youngsters need," said Dr. Balsam. "We'd better let it work."

"I reckon he can ride 'em," said Squire Rawson.

It was voted to sustain him.

The fact that a smooth-faced boy, not as heavy as Jake Dennison by twenty pounds, had "faced down" and quelled the Dennisons all three together, and kept Jake Dennison from going where he wanted to go, struck the humor of the trustees, and they stood by their teacher almost unanimously, and even voted to pay for a new door, which he had offered to pay for himself, as he said he might have to chop it down again. Not that there was not some hostility to him among those to whom his methods were too novel; but when he began to teach his pupils boxing, and showed that with his fists he was more than a match for Jake Dennison, the chief opposition to him died out; and before the year ended, Jake Dennison, putting into practice the art he had learned from his teacher, had thrashed Mr. William Bluffy, the cock of another walk high up across the Ridge, for ridiculing the "newfangled foolishness" of Ridge College, and speaking of its teacher as a "dom-

fool furriner.'' Little Dave Dennison, of all those opposed to him, alone held out. He appeared to be proof against Keith's utmost efforts to be friends.

One day, however, Dave Dennison did not come to school. Keith learned that he had fallen from a tree and broken his leg—''gettin' hawks' eggs for Phrony,'' Keith's informant reported. Phrony was quite scornful about it, but a little perky as well.

''If a boy was such a fool as to go up a tree when he had been told it wouldn't hold him, she could not help it. She did not want the eggs, anyhow,'' she said disdainfully. This was all the reward that little Dave got for his devotion and courage.

That afternoon Keith went over the Ridge to see Dave.

The Dennison home was a small farm-house back of the Ridge, in what was known as a ''cove,'' an opening in the angle between the mountains, where was a piece of level or partly level ground on the banks of one of the little mountain creeks. When Keith arrived he found Mrs. Dennison, a small, angular woman with sharp eyes, a thin nose, and thin lips, very stiff and suspicious. She had never forgiven Keith

for his victory over her boys, and she looked now as if she would gladly have set the dogs on him instead of calling them off as she did when he strode up the path and the yelping pack dashed out at him.

She "didn' know how Dave was," she said glumly. "The Doctor said he was better. She couldn' see no change. Yes, he could go in, she s'posed, if he wanted to," she said ungraciously.

Keith entered. The boy was lying on a big bed, his head resting against the frame of the little opening which went for a window, through which he was peeping wistfully out at the outside world from which he was to be shut off for so many weary weeks. He returned Keith's greeting in the half-surly way in which he had always received his advances since the day of the row; but when Keith sat down on the bed and began to talk to him cheerily of his daring in climbing where no one else had ventured to go, he thawed out, and presently, when Keith drifted on to other stories of daring, he began to be interested, and after a time grew almost friendly.

He was afraid they might have to cut his leg off. His mother, who always took a gloomy view of things, had scared him by telling him she thought it might have to be done; but Keith was

able to reassure him. The Doctor had told him that, while the fracture was very bad, the leg would be saved.

"If he had not been as hard as a lightwood knot, that fall would have mashed him up," said the Doctor. This compliment Keith repeated, and it evidently pleased Dave. The pale face relaxed into a smile. Keith told him stories of other boys who had had similar accidents and had turned them to good account—of Arkwright and Sir William Jones and Commodore Maury, all of whom had laid the foundation for their future fame when they were in bed with broken legs.

When Keith came away he left the boy comforted and cheered, and even the dismal woman at the door gave him a more civil parting than her greeting had been.

Many an afternoon during the boy's convalescence Keith went over the Ridge to see him, taking him story-books, and reading to him until he was strong enough to read himself. And when, weeks later, the lame boy was able to return to school, Keith had no firmer friend in all the Ridge region than Dave Dennison, and Dave had made a mental progress which, perhaps, he would not have made in as many

months at school, for he had received an impulse to know and to be something more than he was. He would show Phrony who he was.

It was fine to Gordon to feel that he was earning his own living. He was already making his way in the world, and often from this first rung of the ladder the young teacher looked far up the shining steep to where Fame and Glory beckoned with their radiant hands. He would be known. He would build bridges that should eclipse Stevenson's. He would be like Warren Hastings, and buy back the home of his fathers and be a great gentleman.

The first pay that he received made him a capitalist. He had no idea before of the joy of wealth. He paid it to old Rawson.

"There is the first return for your investment," he said.

"I don' know about its bein' the first return," said the squire, slowly; "but an investment ain't done till it's all returned." His keen eyes were on Keith's face.

"I know it," said Keith, laughing.

But for Dr. Balsam, Keith sometimes thought that he must have died that first winter, and, in fact, the young man did owe a great deal to the tall, slab-sided man, whose clothes hung on him

so loosely that he appeared in the distance hardly more than a rack to support them. As he came nearer he was a simple old countryman with a deeply graved face and unkempt hair. On nearer view still, you found the deep gray eyes both shrewd and kindly; the mouth under its gray moustache had fine lines, and at times a lurking smile, which yet had in it something grave.

To Dr. Balsam, Keith owed a great deal more than he himself knew at the time. For it is only by looking back that Youth can gauge the steps by which it has climbed.

CHAPTER VI

ALICE YORKE

IT is said that in Brazil a small stream which rises under a bank in a gentleman's garden, after flowing a little distance, encounters a rock and divides into two branches, one of which flows northward and empties into the Amazon, whilst the other, turning to the southward, pours its waters into the Rio del Plata. A very small obstruction caused the divergence and determined the course of those two streams. So it is in life.

One afternoon in the early Spring, Gordon Keith was walking home from school, his books under his arm, when, so to speak, he came on the stone that turned him from his smooth channel and shaped his course in life.

He was going to break a colt for Squire Rawson that afternoon, so he was hurrying; but ever as he strode along down the winding road, the witchery of the tender green leaves and the

odors of Spring filled eyes and nostrils, and called to his spirit with that subtle voice which has stirred Youth since Youth's own Spring awoke amid the leafy trees. In its call were freedom, and the charm of wide spaces, and the unspoken challenge of Youth to the world, and haunting vague memories, and whisperings of unuttered love, and all that makes Youth Youth.

Presently Gordon became aware that a little ahead of him, under the arching boughs, were two children who were hunting for something in the road, and one of them was crying. At the same moment there turned the curve beyond them, coming toward him, a girl on horseback. He watched her with growing interest as she galloped toward him, for he saw that she was young and a stranger. Probably she was from "the Springs," as she was riding one of Gates's horses and was riding him hard.

The rider drew in her horse and stopped as she came up to the children. Keith heard her ask what was the matter with the little one, and the older child's reply that she was crying because she had lost her money. "She was goin' to buy candy with it at the store, but dropped it."

The girl sprang from her horse.

"Oh, you poor little thing! Come here, you dear little kitten. I'll give you some money. Won't you hold my horse? He won't hurt you." This to the elder child.

She threw herself on her knees in the road, as regardless of the dust as were the children, and drawing the sobbing child close to her, took her handkerchief from her pocket and gently wiped its little, dirty, smeared face, and began comforting it in soothing tones. Keith had come up and stood watching her with quickening breath. All he could see under her hat was an oval chin and the dainty curve of a pink cheek where it faded into snow, and at the back of a small head a knot of brown hair resting on the nape of a shapely neck. For the rest, she had a trim figure and wore new gloves which fitted perfectly. Keith mentally decided that she must be about sixteen or seventeen years old, and, from the glimpse he had caught of her, must be pretty. He became conscious suddenly that he had on his worst suit of clothes.

"Good evening," he said, raising his hand to his hat.

The girl glanced up just as the hat was lifted.

"How do you do?"

Their eyes met, and the color surged into Keith's face, and the hat came off with quite a flourish.

Why, she was beautiful! Her eyes were as blue as wet violets.

"I will help you hunt for it," he said half guilefully, half kindly. "Where did she drop it?" He did not take his eyes from the picture of the slim figure on her knees.

"She has lost her money, poor little dear! She was on her way to the store to buy candy, and lost all her money."

At this fresh recital of her loss, the little, smeared face began to pucker again. But the girl cleared it with a kiss.

"There, don't cry. I will give you some. How much was it? A nickel! A whole nickel!" This with the sweetest smile. "Well, you shall have a quarter, and that's four nickels—I mean five."

"She is not strong on arithmetic," said Keith to himself. "She is like Phrony in that."

She began to feel about her skirt, and her face changed.

"Oh, I haven't a cent. I have left my purse at the hotel." This was to Keith.

"Let me give it to her." And he also began

to feel in his pocket, but as he did so his countenance fell. He, too, had not a cent.

"I have left my purse at home, too," he said. "We shall have to do like the woman in the Bible, and sweep diligently till we find the money she lost."

"We are a pauper lot," said Alice Yorke, with a little laugh. Then, as she glanced into the child's big eyes that were beginning to be troubled again, she paused. The next second she drew a small bracelet from her wrist, and began to pull at a small gold charm. "Here, you shall have this; this is gold."

"Oh, don't do that," said Keith. "She wouldn't appreciate it, and it is a pity to spoil your bracelet."

She glanced up at him with a little flash in her blue eyes, as a vigorous twist broke the little gold piece from its chain.

"She shall have it. There, see how she is smiling. I have enjoyed it, and I am glad to have you have it. Now, you can get your candy. Now, kiss me."

Somehow, the phrase and the tone brought back to Keith a hill-top overlooking an English village, and a blue lake below, set like a mirror among the green hills. A little girl in white,

with brown eyes, was handing a doll to another child even more grimy than this one. The reminiscence came to him like a picture thrown by a magic lantern.

The child, without taking her eyes from the tiny bit of metal, put up her little mouth, and the girl kissed her, only to have the kiss wiped off with the chubby, dirty little hand.

The next moment the two little ones started down the road, their heads close together over the bit of yellow gold. Then it was that Alice Yorke for the first time took a real look at Keith, —a look provoked by the casual glance she had had of him but a moment before,—and as she did so the color stole up into her cheeks, as she thought of the way in which she had just addressed him. But for his plain clothes he looked quite a gentleman. He had a really good figure; straight, broad shoulders, and fine eyes.

"Can you tell me what time it is?" she asked, falteringly. "I left my watch at the hotel."

"I haven't a watch; but I think it must be about four o'clock—it was half-past three when I left school, by the school clock; I am not sure it was just right."

"Thank you." She looked at her horse. "I must get back to the hotel. Can you—?"

Keith forestalled her.

"May I help you up?"

"Thanks. Do you know how to mount me?"

"I think so," he said airily, and stepped up close to her, to lift her by the elbows to her saddle. She put out a foot clad in a very pretty, neat shoe. She evidently expected Keith to let her step into his hand. He knew of this mode of helping a lady up, but he had never tried it. And, though he stooped and held his hand as if quite accustomed to it, he was awkward about it, and did not lift her; so she did not get up.

"I don't think you can do it that way," said the girl.

"I don't think so either," said Keith. "I must learn it. But I know how to do it this way." He caught her by both elbows. "Now jump!"

Taken by surprise she gave a little spring, and he lifted her like a feather, and seated her in her saddle.

As she rode away, he stood aside and lifted his hat with an air that surprised her. Also, as she rode away, he remarked that she sat her horse very well and had a very straight, slim figure; but the picture of her kneeling in the

dust, with her arm around the little sobbing child, was what he dwelt on.

Just as she disappeared, a redbird in its gorgeous uniform flitted dipping across the road, and, taking his place in a bush, began to sing imperiously for his mate.

"Ah, you lucky rascal," thought Keith, "you don't get caught by a pretty girl, in a ragged coat. You have your best clothes on every day."

Next second, as the bird's rich notes rang out, a deeper feeling came to him, and a wave of dissatisfaction with his life swept over him. He suddenly seemed lonelier than he had been. Then the picture of the girl on her knees came back to him, and his heart softened toward her. He determined to see her again. Perhaps Dr. Balsam knew her?

As the young girl rode back to the hotel she had her reward in a pleasant sensation. She had done a good deed in helping to console a little child, and no kindness ever goes without this reward. Besides, she had met a young, strange man, a country boy, it was true, and very plainly dressed, but with the manner and tone of a gentleman, quite good-looking, and very strong. Strength, mere physical strength, appeals to all girls at certain ages, and Miss

Alice Yorke's thoughts quite softened toward the stranger. Why, he as good as picked her up! He must be as strong as Norman Wentworth, who stroked his crew. She recalled with approval his good shoulders.

She would ask the old Doctor who he was. He was a pleasant old man, and though her mother and Mrs. Nailor, another New York lady, did not like the idea of his being the only doctor at the Springs, he had been very nice to her. He had seen her sitting on the ground the day before and had given her his buggy-robe to sit on, saying, with a smile, "You must not sit on the wet ground, or you may fall into my hands."

"I might do worse," she had said. And he had looked at her with his deep eyes twinkling.

"Ah, you young minx! When do you begin flattering? And at what age do you let men off?"

When Miss Alice Yorke arrived at the hotel she found her mother and Mrs. Nailor engaged in an animated conversation on the porch.

The girl told of the little child she had found crying in the road, and gave a humorous account of the young countryman trying to put her on her horse.

"He was very good-looking, too," she de-

clared gayly. "I think he must be studying for the ministry, like Mr. Rimmon, for he quoted the Bible."

Both Mrs. Yorke and Mrs. Nailor thought it rather improper for her to be riding alone on the public roads.

The next day Keith put on his best suit of clothes when he went to school, and that afternoon he walked home around the Ridge, as he had done the day before, thinking that possibly he might meet the girl again, but he was disappointed. The following afternoon he determined to go over to the Springs and see if she was still there and find out who she was. Accordingly, he left the main road, which ran around the base of the Ridge, and took a footpath which led winding up through the woods over the Ridge. It was a path that Gordon often chose when he wanted to be alone. The way was steep and rocky, and was so little used that often he never met any one from the time he plunged into the woods until he emerged from them on the other side of the Ridge. In some places the pines were so thick that it was always twilight among them; in others they rose high and stately in the full majesty of primeval growth, keeping at a distance from each other,

as though, like another growth, the higher they got the more distant they wished to hold all others. Trees have so much in common with men, it is no wonder that the ancients, who lived closer to both than we do nowadays, fabled that minds of men sometimes inhabited their trunks.

Gordon Keith was in a particularly gloomy frame of mind on this day. He had been trying to inspire in his pupils some conception of the poetry contained in history. He told them the story of Hannibal—his aim, his struggles, his conquest. As he told it the written record took life, and he marched and fought and lived with the great Carthaginian captain—lived for conquest.

"Beyond the Alps lies Italy." He had read the tale with lips that quivered with feeling, but as he looked up at his little audience, he met only listless eyes and dull faces. A big boy was preparing a pin to evoke from a smaller neighbor the attention he himself was withholding. The neighbor was Dave Dennison. Dave was of late actually trying to learn something. Dave was the only boy who was listening. A little girl with a lisp was trying in vain to divide her attention between the story and an imprisoned fly the boy next her was torturing, whilst Phrony

was reading a novel on the sly. The others were all engaged in any other occupation than thinking of Hannibal or listening to the reader.

Gordon had shut the book in a fit of disappointment and disgust and dismissed the school, and now he was trying with very poor success to justify himself for his outbreak of impatience. His failure spoiled the pleasure he had anticipated in going to the Springs to find out who the Madonna of the Dust was.

At a spot high up on the rocky backbone, one could see for a long way between the great brownish-gray trunks, and Gordon turned out of the dim path to walk on the thick brown carpet of pine-needles. It was a favorite spot with Gordon, and here he read Keats and Poe and other poets of melancholy, so dear to a young man's heart.

Beyond the pines at their eastern edge, a great crag jutted forth in a sort of shoulder, a vast flying-buttress that supported the pine-clad Ridge above—a mighty stone Atlas carrying the hills on its shoulder. From this rock one looked out eastward over the rolling country below to where, far beyond sloping hills covered with forest, it merged into a soft blue that faded away into the sky itself. In that misty space

lay everything that Gordon Keith had known and loved in the past. Off there to the eastward was his old home, with its wide fields, its deep memories. There his forefathers had lived for generations and had been the leaders, making their name always the same with that of gentleman.

Farther away, beyond that dim line lay the great world, the world of which he had had as a boy a single glimpse and which he would yet conquer.

Keith had climbed to the crest of the Ridge and was making his way through the great pines to the point where the crag jutted out sheer and massive, overlooking the reaches of rolling country below, when he lifted his eyes, and just above him, half seated, half reclining against a ledge of rock, was the very girl he had seen two days before. Her eyes were closed, and her face was so white that the thought sprang into Keith's mind that she was dead, and his heart leaped into his throat. At the distance of a few yards he stopped and scanned her closely. She had on a riding-habit; her hat had fallen on her neck; her dark hair, loosened, lay about her throat, increasing the deep pallor of her face. Keith's pity changed

into sorrow. Suddenly, as he leaned forward, his heart filled with a vague grief, she opened her eyes—as blue as he remembered them, but now misty and dull. She did not stir or speak, but gazed at him fixedly for a little space, and then the eyes closed again wearily, her head dropped over to the side, and she began to sink down.

Gordon sprang forward to keep her from rolling down the bank. As he gently caught and eased her down on the soft carpeting of pine-needles, he observed how delicate her features were; the blue veins showed clearly on her temples and the side of her throat, and her face had that refinement that unconsciousness often gives.

Gordon knew that the best thing to do was to lower her head and unfasten her collar. As he loosened the collar, the whiteness of her throat struck him almost dazzlingly. Instinctively he took the little crumpled handkerchief that lay on the pine carpet beside her, and spread it over her throat reverently. He lifted her limp hand gently and felt her little wrist for her pulse.

Just then her eyelids quivered; her lips moved slightly, stopped, moved again with a

faint sigh; and then her eyelids opened slowly, and again those blue eyes gazed up at him with a vague inquiry.

The next second she appeared to recover consciousness. She drew a long, deep breath, as though she were returning from some unknown deep, and a faint little color flickered in her cheek.

"Oh, it's you?" she said, recognizing him. "How do you do? I think I must have hurt myself when I fell. I tried to ride my horse down the bank, and he slipped and fell with me, and I do not remember much after that. He must have run away. I tried to walk, but—but I am better now. Could you catch my horse for me?"

Keith rose and followed the horse's track for some distance along the little path. When he returned, the girl was still seated against the rock.

"Did you see him?" she asked languidly, sitting up.

"I am afraid that he has gone home. He was galloping. I could tell from his tracks."

"I think I can walk. I must."

She tried to rise, but, with the pain caused by the effort, the blood sprang to her cheek for a second and then fled back to her heart, and she

sank back, her teeth catching her lip sharply to keep down an expression of anguish.

"I must get back. If my horse should reach the hotel without me, my mother will be dreadfully alarmed. I promised her to be back by—"

Gordon did not hear what the hour was, for she turned away her face and began to cry quietly. She tried to brush the tears away with her fingers; but one or two slipped past and dropped on her dress. With face still averted, she began to feel about her dress for her handkerchief; but being unable to find it, she gave it up.

There was something about her crying so quietly that touched the young man very curiously. She seemed suddenly much younger, quite like a little girl, and he felt like kissing her to comfort her. He did the next thing.

"Don't cry," he said gently. "Here, take mine." He pressed his handkerchief on her. He blessed Heaven that it was uncrumpled.

Now there is something about one's lending another a handkerchief that goes far toward breaking down the barriers of conventionality and bridges years. Keith in a moment had

come to feel a friendliness for the girl that he might not have felt in years, and he began to soothe her.

"I don't know what is the matter—with me," she said, as she dried her eyes. "I am not—usually so—weak and foolish. I was only afraid my mother would think something had happened to me—and she has not been very well." She made a brave effort to command herself, and sat up very straight. "There. Thank you very much." She handed him his handkerchief almost grimly. "Now I am all right. But I am afraid I cannot walk. I tried, but—. You will have to go and get me a carriage, if you please."

Keith rose and began to gather up his books and stuff them in his pockets.

"No carriage can get up here; the pines are too thick below, and there is no road; but I will carry you down to where a vehicle can come, and then get you one."

She took a glance at his spare figure. "You cannot carry me; you are not strong enough. I want you to get me a carriage or a wagon, please. You can go to the hotel. We are stopping at the Springs."

By this time Gordon had forced the books

into his pocket, and he squared himself before her.

"Now," he said, without heeding her protest; and leaning down, he slipped his arms under her and lifted her as tenderly and as easily as if she had been a little girl.

As he bore her along, the pain subsided, and she found opportunity to take a good look at his face. His profile was clean-cut; the mouth was pleasant and curved slightly upward, but, under the weight he was carrying, was so close shut as to bring out the chin boldly. The cheek-bones were rather high; the gray eyes were wide open and full of light. And as he advanced, walking with easy strides where the path was smooth, picking his way carefully where it was rough, the color rose under the deep tan of his cheeks.

She was the first to break the silence. She had been watching the rising color in his face, the dilation of his nostrils, and feeling the quickening rise and fall of his chest.

"Put me down now and rest; you are tired."

"I am not tired." He trudged on. He would show her that if he had not been able to mount her on her horse, at least it was not from lack of strength.

"Please put me down; it pains me," she said guilefully.

He stopped instantly, and selecting a clear place, seated her softly.

"I beg your pardon. I was a brute, thinking only of myself."

He seated himself near her, and stole a glance at her face. Their eyes met, and he looked away. He thought her quite beautiful.

To break the silence, she asked, a little tone of politeness coming into her voice: "May I inquire what your name is? I am Miss Yorke — Miss Alice Yorke," she added, intending to make him feel at ease.

"Gordon Keith is my name. Where are you from?" His manner was again perfectly easy.

"From New York."

"I thought you were."

She fancied that a little change came over his face and into his manner, and she resented it. She looked down the hill. Without a word he rose and started to lift her again. She made a gesture of dissent. But before she could object further, he had lifted her again, and, with steady eyes bent on the stony path, was picking his way down the steep hill.

"I am dreadfully sorry," he said kindly, as

she gave a start over a little twinge. "It is the only way to get down. No vehicle could get up here at present, unless it were some kind of a flying chariot like Elijah's. It is only a little farther now."

What a pleasant voice he had! Every atom of pride and protection in his soul was enlisted.

When they reached the road, the young lady wanted Gordon to go off and procure a vehicle at the hotel. But he said he could not leave her alone by the roadside; he would carry her on to a house only a little way around the bend.

"Why, I can carry a sack of salt," he said, with boyish pride, standing before her very straight and looking down on her with frank eyes.

Her eyes flashed in dudgeon over the comparison.

"A girl is very different from a sack of salt."

"Not always—Lot's wife, for instance. If you keep on looking back, you don't know what may happen to you. Come on."

Just then a vehicle rapidly driven was heard in the distance, and the next moment it appeared in sight.

"There comes mamma now," said the girl, waving to the lady in it.

Mrs. Yorke sprang from the carriage as soon as it drew up. She was a handsome woman of middle age and was richly dressed. She was now in a panic of motherly solicitude.

"Oh, Alice, how you have frightened me!" she exclaimed. "You were due at the hotel two hours ago, and when your horse came without you! You will kill me!" She clapped her hands to her heart and panted. "You know my heart is weak!"

Alice protested her sorrow, and Keith put in a word for her, declaring that she had been dreadfully troubled lest the horse should frighten her.

"And well she might be," exclaimed Mrs. Yorke, giving him a bare glance and then turning back to her daughter. "Mrs. Nailor was the first who heard your horse had come home. She ran and told me. And, oh, I was so frightened! She was sure you were killed."

"You might be sure she would be the first to hear and tell you," said the girl. "Why, mamma, one always sprains one's knee when one's horse falls. That is part of the programme. This—gentleman happened to come along, and helped me down to the road, and we were just discussing whether I should go on

farther when you came up. Mother, this is Mr. Keith."

Keith bowed. He was for some reason pleased that she did not say anything of the way in which he had brought her down the Ridge.

Mrs. Yorke turned and thanked him with graciousness, possibly with a little condescension. He was conscious that she gave him a sweeping glance, and was sorry his shoes were so old. But Mrs. Yorke took no further notice of him.

"Oh, what will your father say! You know he wanted us to go to California; but you would come South. After Mr. Wickersham told you of his place, nothing else would satisfy you."

"Oh, papa! You know I can settle him," said the girl.

Mrs. Yorke began to lament the wretchedness of a region where there was no doctor of reputation.

"There is a very fine surgeon in the village. Dr. Balsam is one of the best surgeons anywhere," said Keith.

"Oh, I know that old man. No doubt, he is good enough for little common ailments," said Mrs. Yorke, "but in a case like this! What does he know about surgery?" She turned back

to her daughter. "I shall telegraph your father to send Dr. Pilbury down at once."

Keith flushed at her manner.

"A good many people have to trust their lives to him," he said coldly. "And he has had about as much surgical practice as most men. He was in the army."

The girl began again to belittle her injury.

It was nothing, absolutely nothing, she declared.

"And besides," she said, "I know the Doctor. I met him the other day. He is a dear old man." She ended by addressing Keith.

"One of the best," said Keith, warmly.

"Well, we must get you into the vehicle and take you home immediately," said her mother. "Can you help put my daughter into the carriage?" Mrs. Yorke looked at the driver, a stolid colored man, who was surly over having had to drive his horses so hard.

Before the man could answer, Gordon stepped forward, and, stooping, lifted the girl, and quietly put her up into the vehicle. She simply smiled and said, "Thank you," quite as if she were accustomed to being lifted into carriages by strange young men whom she had just met on the roadside.

Mrs. Yorke's eyes opened wide.

"How strong you must be!" she exclaimed, with a woman's admiration for physical strength.

Keith bowed, and, with a flush mounting to his cheeks, backed a little away.

"Oh, he has often lifted sacks of salt," said the girl, half turning her eyes on Keith with a gleam of satisfaction in them.

Mrs. Yorke looked at her in astonishment.

"Why, Alice!" she exclaimed reprovingly under her breath.

"He told me so himself," asserted the girl, defiantly.

"I may have to do so again," said Keith, dryly.

Mrs. Yorke's hand went toward the region of her pocket, but uncertainly; for she was not quite sure what he was. His face and air belied his shabby dress. A closer look than she had given him caused her to stop with a start.

"Mr.- -ah—?" After trying to recall the name, she gave it up. "I am very much obliged to you for your kindness to my daughter," she began. "I do not know how I can compensate you; but if you will come to the hotel sometime to-morrow—any time—perhaps, there is some-

thing—? Can you come to the hotel to-morrow?" Her tone was condescending.

"Thank you," said Keith, quietly. "I am afraid I cannot go to the village to-morrow. I have already been more than compensated in being able to render a service to a lady. I have a school, and I make it a rule never to go anywhere except Friday evening or Saturday." He lifted his hat and backed away.

As they drove away the girl said, "Thank you" and "Good-by," very sweetly.

"Who is he, Alice? What is he?" asked her mother.

"I don't know. Mr. Keith. He is a gentleman."

As Gordon stood by the roadside and saw the carriage disappear in a haze of dust, he was oppressed with a curious sense of loneliness. The isolation of his position seemed to strike him all on a sudden. That stout, full-voiced woman, with her rich clothes, had interposed between him and the rest of his kind. She had treated him condescendingly. He would show her some day who he was. But her daughter! He went off into a revery.

He turned, and made his way slowly and musingly in the direction of his home.

A new force had suddenly come into his life, a new land had opened before him. One young girl had affected it. His school suddenly become a prison. His field was the world.

As he passed along, scarcely conscious of where he was, he met the very man of all others he would rather have met—Dr. Balsam. He instantly informed the Doctor of the accident, and suggested that he had better hurry on to the Springs.

"A pretty girl, with blue eyes and brown hair?" inquired the Doctor.

"Yes." The color stole into Gordon's cheeks.

"With a silly woman for a mother, who is always talking about her heart and pats you on the back?"

"I don't know. Yes, I think so."

"I know her. Is the limb broken?" he asked with interest.

"No, I do not think it is; but badly sprained. She fainted from the pain, I think."

"You say it occurred up on the Ridge?"

"Yes, near the big pines—at the summit."

"Why, how did she get down? There is no road." He was gazing up at the pine-clad spur above them.

"I helped her down." A little color flushed into his face.

"Ah! You supported her? She can walk on it?"

"Ur—no. I brought her down. I had to bring her. She could not walk—not a step."

"Oh! ah! I see. I'll hurry on and see how she is."

As he rode off he gave a grunt.

"Humph!" It might have meant any one of several things. Perhaps, what it did mean was that "Youth is the same the world over, and here is a chance for this boy to make a fool of himself, and he will probably do it, as I did." As the Doctor jogged on over the rocky road, his brow was knit in deep reflection; but his thoughts were far away among other pines on the Piscataqua. That boy's face had turned the dial back nearly forty years.

CHAPTER VII

MRS. YORKE FINDS A GENTLEMAN

WHEN Mrs. Yorke arrived at the hotel, Dr. Balsam was nowhere to be found. She was just sending off a messenger to despatch a telegram to the nearest city for a surgeon, when she saw the Doctor coming up the hill toward the hotel at a rapid pace.

He tied his horse, and, with his saddle-pockets over his arm, came striding up the walk. There was something reassuring in the quick, firm step with which he came toward her. She had not given him credit for so much energy.

Mrs. Yorke led the way toward her rooms, giving a somewhat highly colored description of the accident, the Doctor following without a word, taking off his gloves as he walked. They reached the door, and Mrs. Yorke flung it open with a flurry.

"Here he is at last, my poor child!" she exclaimed.

The sight of Alice lying on a lounge quite effaced Mrs. Yorke from the Doctor's mind. The next second he had taken the girl's hand, and holding it with a touch that would not have crumpled a butterfly's wings, he was taking a flitting gauge of her pulse. Mrs. Yorke continued to talk volubly, but the Doctor took no heed of her.

"A little rest with fixation, madam, is all that is necessary," he said quietly, at length, when he had made an examination. "But it must be rest, entire rest of limb and body—and mind," he added after a pause. "Will you ask Mrs. Gates to send me a kettle of hot water as soon as possible?"

Mrs. Yorke had never been so completely ignored by any physician. She tossed her head, but she went to get the water.

"So my young man Keith found you and brought you down the Ridge?" said the Doctor presently to the girl.

"Yes; how do you know?" she asked, her blue eyes wide open with surprise.

"Never mind; I may tell you next time I come, if you get well quickly," he said smiling.

"Who is he?" she asked.

"He is the teacher of the school over the

Ridge—what is known as the Ridge College," said the Doctor, with a smile.

Just at this moment Mrs. Yorke bustled in.

"Alice, I thought the Doctor said you were not to talk."

The Doctor's face wore an amused expression.

"Well, just one more question," said the girl to him. "How much does a sack of salt weigh?"

"About two hundred pounds. To be accurate,—"

"No wonder he said I was light," laughed the girl.

"Who is a young man named Keith—a schoolboy, who lives about here?" inquired Mrs. Yorke, suddenly.

"The Keiths do not live about here," said the Doctor. "Gordon Keith, to whom you doubtless refer, is the son of General Keith, who lives in an adjoining county below the Ridge. His father was our minister during the war—"

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by the appearance of Mrs. Gates with the desired kettle of hot water, and the Doctor, stopping in the midst of his sentence, devoted all of his attention to his patient.

The confidence which he displayed and the

deftness with which he worked impressed Mrs. Yorke so much that when he was through she said: "Doctor, I have been wondering how a man like you could be content to settle down in this mountain wilderness. I know many fashionable physicians in cities who could not have done for Alice a bit better than you have done —indeed, nothing like so well—with such simple appliances."

Dr. Balsam's eyes rested on her gravely. "Well, madam, we could not all be city doctors. These few sheep in the wilderness need a little shepherding when they get sick. You must reflect also that if we all went away there would be no one to look after the city people when they come to our mountain wilderness; they, at least, need good attendance."

By the time Gordon awoke next morning he had determined that he would see his new acquaintance again. He must see her; he would not allow her to go out of his life so; she should, at least, know who he was, and Mrs. Yorke should know, too.

That afternoon, impelled by some strange motive, he took the path over the Ridge again. It had been a long day and a wearing one. He had tried Hannibal once more; but his pupils

cared less for Hannibal than for the bumble-bees droning in the window-frame. For some reason the dull routine of lessons had been duller than usual. The scholars had never been so stupid. Again and again the face that he had seen rest on his arm the day before came between him and his page, and when the eyes opened they were as blue as forget-me-nots. He would rouse himself with a start and plunge back bravely into the mysteries of physical geography or of compound fractions, only to find himself, at the first quiet moment, picking his way through the pines with that white face resting against his shoulder.

When school was out he declined the invitation of the boys to walk with them, and settled himself in his chair as though he meant to prepare the lessons for the next day. After a quarter of an hour, spent mostly in revery, he rose, put up his books, closed the door, and took the same path he had followed the day before. As he neared the spot where he had come on the girl, he almost expected to find her propped against the rock as he had found her the afternoon before. He was conscious of a distinct shock of loneliness that she was not there. The woods had never appeared so empty; the soughing of the pines had never sounded so dreary.

He threw himself down on the thick brown carpet. He had not felt so lonely in years. What was he! And what chance did he have! He was alone in the wilderness. He had been priding himself on being the superior of those around him, and that strange woman had treated him with condescension, when he had strained his heart out to get her daughter to the road safely and without pain.

His eyes rested on the level, pale line of the horizon far below him. Down there lay all he had ever known and loved. All was changed; his home belonged to an alien. He turned his face away. On the other side, the distant mountains lay a mighty rampart across the sky. He wondered if the Alps could be higher or more beautiful. A line he had been explaining the day before to his scholars recurred to him: "Beyond those mountains lies Italy."

Gradually it came to him that he was duller than his scholars. Those who were the true leaders of men surmounted difficulties. Others had crossed the mountains to find the Italy of their ambition. Why should not he? The thought strung him up sharply, and before he knew it he was standing upright, his face lifted to the sky, his nerves tense, his pulses beating, and his breath coming quickly. Beyond that

blue rim lay the world. He would conquer and achieve honors and fame, and win back his old home, and build up again his fortune, and do honor to his name. He seized his books, and, with one more look at the heights beyond, turned and strode swiftly along the path.

It was, perhaps, fortunate that the day had been a dull one for both Mrs. Yorke and Alice. Alice had been confined to her lounge, and after the first anxiety was over Mrs. Yorke had been inclined to scold her for her carelessness and the fright she had given her. They had not agreed about a number of matters. Alice had been talking about her adventure until Mrs. Yorke had begun to criticise her rescuer as "a spindling country boy."

"He was strong enough to bring me down the mountain a mile in his arms," declared the girl. "He said it was half a mile, but I am sure it was a mile."

Mrs. Yorke was shocked, and charged Alice with being susceptible enough to like all men.

"All those who are strong and good-looking," protested Alice.

Their little difference had now been made up, and Alice, who had been sitting silent, with a look of serious reflection on her face, said:

"Mamma, why don't you invite him over to dinner?"

Mrs. Yorke gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Why, Alice, we know nothing about him."

But the girl was insistent.

"Why, mamma, I am sure he is a gentleman. Dr. Balsam said he was one of the best people about here, and his father was a clergyman. Besides, he is very interesting. His father was in the war; I believe he was a general."

Mrs. Yorke pondered a moment, her pen in the air. Her thoughts flew to New York and her acquaintances there. Their view was her gauge.

"Well," she said doubtfully, "perhaps, later I will; there is no one here whom we know except Mrs. Nailor. I have heard that the people are very interesting if you can get at them. I'll invite him first to luncheon Saturday, and see how he is."

It is, doubtless, just as well that none of us has the magic mirror which we used to read of in our childhood, which showed what any one we wished to know about was doing. It would, no doubt, cause many perplexities from which, in our ignorance, we are happily free. Had Gordon Keith known the terms on which he was

invited to take a meal in the presence of Mrs. Yorke, he would have been incensed. He had been fuming about her condescension ever since he had met her; yet he no sooner received her polite note than he was in the best humor possible. He brushed up his well-worn clothes, treated himself to a new necktie, which he had been saving all the session, and just at the appointed hour presented himself with a face so alight with expectancy, and a manner which, while entirely modest, was so natural and easy, that Mrs. Yorke was astonished. She could scarcely credit the fact that this bright-eyed young man, with his fine nose, firm chin, and melodious voice, was the same with the dusty, hot-faced, dishevelled-looking country boy to whom she had thought of offering money for a kindness two days before.

When Keith first entered the room Alice Yorke was seated in a reclining-chair, enveloped in soft white, from which she gave him a smiling greeting. For years afterwards, whenever Gordon Keith thought of beauty it was of a girl smiling up at him out of a cloud of white. It was a charming visit for him, and he reproached himself for his hard thoughts about Mrs. Yorke. He aired all of his knowledge,

and made such a favorable impression on the good lady that she became very friendly with him. He did not know that Mrs. Yorke's kindness to him was condescension, and her cordiality inspired as much by curiosity as courtesy.

"Dr. Balsam has been telling us about you, Mr. Keith," said Mrs. Yorke, with a bow which brought a pleased smile to the young man's face.

"He has? The Doctor has always been good to me. I am afraid he has a higher opinion of me than I deserve," he said, with a boy's pretended modesty, whilst his eyes strongly belied his words.

Mrs. Yorke assured him that such could not be the case.

"Don't you want to know what he said?" asked Miss Alice, with a bell-like laugh.

"Yes; what?" he smiled.

"He said if you undertook to carry a bag of salt down a mountain, or up it either, you would never rest until you got there."

Her eyes twinkled, and Gordon appeared half teased, though he was inwardly pleased.

Mrs. Yorke looked shocked.

"Oh, Alice, Dr. Balsam did not say that, for I heard him!" she exclaimed reprovingly.

"Dr. Balsam was very complimentary to you, Mr. Keith," she explained seriously. "He said your people were among the best families about here." She meant to be gracious; but Gordon's face flushed in spite of himself. The condescension was too apparent.

"Your father was a pre—a—a—clergyman?" said Mrs. Yorke, who had started to say "preacher," but substituted the other word as more complimentary.

"My father a clergyman! No'm. He is good enough to be one; but he was a planter and a—a—soldier," said Gordon.

Mrs. Yorke looked at her daughter in some mystification. Could this be the wrong man?

"Why, he said he was a clergyman?" she insisted.

Gordon gazed at the girl in bewilderment.

"Yes; he said he was a minister," she replied to his unspoken inquiry.

Gordon broke into a laugh.

"Oh, he was a special envoy to England after he was wounded."

The announcement had a distinct effect upon Mrs. Yorke, who instantly became much more cordial to Gordon. She took a closer look at him than she had given herself the trouble to

take before, and discovered, under the sunburn and worn clothes, something more than she had formerly observed. The young man's expression had changed. A reference to his father always sobered him and kindled a light in his eyes. It was the first time Mrs. Yorke had taken in what her daughter meant by calling him handsome.

"Why, he is quite distinguished-looking!" she thought to herself. And she reflected what a pity it was that so good-looking a young man should have been planted down there in that out-of-the-way pocket of the world, and thus lost to society. She did not know that the kindling eyes opposite her were burning with a resolve that not only Mrs. Yorke, but the world, should know him, and that she should recognize his superiority.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. KEITH'S IDEALS

AFTER this it was astonishing how many excuses Gordon could find for visiting the village. He was always wanting to consult a book in the Doctor's library, or get something, which, indeed, meant that he wanted to get a glimpse of a young girl with violet eyes and pink cheeks, stretched out in a lounging-chair, picturesquely reclining amid clouds of white pillows. Nearly always he carried with him a bunch of flowers from Mrs. Rawson's garden, which were to make patches of pink or red or yellow among Miss Alice's pillows, and bring a fresh light into her eyes. And sometimes he took a basket of cherries or strawberries for Mrs. Yorke. His friends, the Doctor and the Rawsons, began to rally him on his new interest in the Springs.

"I see you are takin' a few nubbins for the old cow," said Squire Rawson, one afternoon

as Gordon started off, at which Gordon blushed as red as the cherries he was carrying. It was just what he had been doing.

"Well, that is the way to ketch the calf," said the old farmer, jovially; "but I 'low the mammy is used to pretty high feedin'." He had seen Mrs. Yorke driving along in much richer attire than usually dazzled the eyes of the Ridge neighborhood, and had gauged her with a shrewd eye.

Miss Alice Yorke's sprain turned out to be less serious than had been expected. She herself had proved a much less refractory patient than her mother had ever known her.

It does not take two young people of opposite sexes long to overcome the formalities which convention has fixed among their seniors, especially when one of them has brought the other down a mountain-side in his arms.

Often, in a sheltered corner of the long verandah, Keith read to Alice on balmy afternoons, or in the moonlit evenings sauntered with her through the fields of their limited experience, and quoted snatches from his chosen favorites, poems that lived in his heart, and fancied her the "maid of the downward look and sidelong glance."

Thus, by the time Alice Yorke was able to move about again, she and Keith had already reached a footing where they had told each other a good deal of their past, and were finding the present very pleasant, and one of them, at least, was beginning, when he turned his eyes to the future, to catch the glimmer of a very rosy light.

It showed in his appearance, in his face, where a new expression of a more definite ambition and a higher resolution was beginning to take its place.

Dr. Balsam noted it, and when he met Gordon he began to have a quizzical light in his deep-gray eyes. He had, too, a tender tone in his voice when he addressed the girl. Perhaps, a vision came to him at times of another country lad, well-born like this one, and, like this one, poor, wandering on the New England hills with another young girl, primmer, perhaps, and less sophisticated than this little maiden, who had come from the westward to spend a brief holiday on the banks of the Piscataqua, and had come into his life never to depart—of his dreams and his hopes; of his struggles to achieve the education which would make him worthy of her; and then of the over-

throw of all: of darkness and exile and wanderings.

When the Doctor sat on his porch of an evening, with his pipe, looking out over the sloping hills, sometimes his face grew almost melancholy. Had he not been intended for other things than this exile? Abigail Brooke had never married, he knew. What might have happened had he gone back? And when he next saw Alice Yorke there would be a softer tone in his voice, and he would talk a deeper and higher philosophy to her than she had ever heard, belittling the gaudy rewards of life, and instilling in her mind ideas of something loftier and better and finer than they. He even told her once something of the story of his life, and of the suffering and sorrow that had been visited upon the victims of a foolish pride and a selfish ambition. Though he did not confide to her that it was of himself he spoke, the girl's instinct instantly told her that it was his own experience that he related, and her interest was deeply excited.

"Did she ever marry, Doctor?" she asked eagerly. "Oh, I hope she did not. I might forgive her if she did not; but if she married I would never forgive her!"

The Doctor's eyes, as they rested on her eager face, had a kindly expression in them, and a look of amusement lurked there also.

"No; she never married," he said. "Nor did he."

"Oh, I am glad of that," she exclaimed; and then more softly added, "I know he did not."

Dr. Balsam gazed at her calmly. He did not pursue the subject further. He thought he had told his story in such a way as to convey the moral without disclosing that he spoke of himself. Yet she had discovered it instantly. He wondered if she had seen also the moral he intended to convey.

Alice Yorke was able to walk now, and many an afternoon Gordon Keith invited her to stroll with him on the mountain-side or up the Ridge, drawing her farther and farther as her strength returned.

The Spring is a dangerous season for a young man and a pretty girl to be thrown closely together for the first time, and the budding woods are a perilous pasture for their browsing thoughts. It was not without some insight that the ancient poets pictured dryads as inhabitants of the woods, and made the tinkling springs

and rippling streams the abiding-places of their nymphs.

The Spring came with a burst of pink and green. The mountains took on delicate shades, and the trees blossomed into vast flowers, feathery and fine as lace.

An excursion in the budding woods has been dangerous ever since the day when Eve found a sinuous stranger lurking there in gay disguise, and was beguiled into tasting the tempting fruit he offered her. It might be an interesting inquiry to collect even the most notable instances of those who, wandering all innocent and joyous amid the bowers, have found the honey of poisonous flowers where they meant only innocence. But the reader will, perhaps, recall enough instances in a private and unrecorded history to fill the need of illustration. It suffices, then, to say that, each afternoon that Gordon Keith wandered with Alice Yorke through the leafy woods, he was straying farther in that perilous path where the sunlight always sifts down just ahead, but the end is veiled in mist, and where sometimes darkness falls.

These strolls had all the charm for him of discovery, for he was always finding in her some

new trait, and every one was, he thought, an added charm, even to her unexpected alternations of ignorance and knowledge, her little feminine outbreaks of caprice. One afternoon they had strolled farther than usual, as far even as the high pines beyond which was the great rock looking to the northeastward. There she had asked him to help her up to the top of the rock, but he had refused. He told her that she had walked already too far, and he would not permit her to climb it.

"Not permit me! Well, I like that!" she said, with a flash of her blue eyes; and springing from her seat on the brown carpet, before he could interpose, she was climbing up the high rock as nimbly as if she were a boy.

He called to her to stop, but she took no heed. He began to entreat her, but she made no answer. He was in terror lest she might fall, and sprang after her to catch her; but up, up she climbed, with as steady a foot and as sure an eye as he could have shown himself, until she reached the top, when, looking down on him with dancing eyes, she kissed her hand in triumph and then turned away, her cheeks aglow. When he reached the top, she was standing on the very edge of the precipice, looking far over

the long reach of sloping country to the blue line of the horizon. Keith almost gasped at her temerity. He pleaded with her not to be so venturesome.

"Please stand farther back, I beg you," he said as he reached her side.

"Now, that is better," she said, with a little nod to him, her blue eyes full of triumph, and she seated herself quietly on the rock.

Keith began to scold her, but she laughed at him.

He had done it often, she said, and what he could do she could do.

The beauty of the wide landscape sank into both their minds, and after a little they both took a graver tone.

"Tell me where your old home is," she said presently, after a long pause in which her face had grown thoughtful. "You told me once that you could see it from this rock."

Keith pointed to a spot on the far horizon. He did not know that it was to see this even more than to brave him that she had climbed to the top of the rock.

"Now tell me about it," she said. "Tell me all over what you have told me before." And Keith related all he could remember. Touched

with her sympathy, he told it with more feeling than he had ever shown before. When he spoke of the loss of his home, of his mortification, and of his father's quiet dignity, she turned her face away to keep him from seeing the tears that were in her eyes.

"I can understand your feeling a little," she said presently; "but I did not know that any one could have so much feeling for a plantation. I suppose it is because it is in the country, with its trees and flowers and little streams. We have had three houses since I can remember. The one that we have now on Fifth Avenue is four times as large—yes, six times as large—and a hundred times as fine as the one I can first remember, and yet, somehow, I always think, when I am sad or lonely, of the little white house with the tiny rooms in it, with their low ceilings and small windows, where I used to go when I was a very little girl to see my father's mother. Mamma does not care for it; she was brought up in the city; but I think my father loves it just as I do. He always says he is going to buy it back, and I am going to make him do it."

"I am going to buy back mine some day," said Keith, very slowly.

She glanced at him. His eyes were fastened

on the far-off horizon, and there was that in his face which she had never seen there before, and which made her admire him more than she had ever done.

"I hope you will," she said. She almost hated Ferdy Wickersham for having spoken of the place as Keith told her he had spoken.

When Keith reached home that evening he had a wholly new feeling for the girl with whom accident had so curiously thrown him. He was really in love with her. Hitherto he had allowed himself merely to drift with the pleasant tide that had been setting in throughout these last weeks. But the phases that she had shown that afternoon, her spirit, her courage, her capricious rebelliousness, and, above all, that glimpse into her heart which he had obtained as she sat on the rock overlooking the wide sweep where he had had his home, and where the civilization to which it belonged had had its home, had shown him a new creature, and he plunged into love. Life appeared suddenly to open wide her gates and flood him with her rosy light.

CHAPTER IX

MR. KEITH IS UNPRACTICAL, AND MRS. YORKE GIVES HIM GOOD ADVICE

THE strolls in the budding woods and the glimpses shown her of a spirit somewhat different from any she had known were beginning to have their influence on Alice. It flattered her and filled her with a certain content that the young school-teacher should like her so much; yet, knowing herself, it gave her a vague feeling that he was wanting in that quality of sound judgment which she recognized in some of her other admirers. It rather frightened her to feel that she was on a pedestal; and often he soared away from her with his poetry and his fancies, and she was afraid that he would discover it and think she was a hypocrite. Something that her mother had said remained in her mind.

"He knows so much, mamma," said Alice one day. "Why, he can quote whole pages of poetry."

"He is too romantic, my dear, to be practical," said Mrs. Yorke, who looked at the young men who approached her daughter with an eye as cool as a physician's glass. "He, perhaps, does know more about books than any boy of his age I am acquainted with; but poetry is a very poor thing to live on; and if he were practical he would not be teaching that wretched little school in the wilderness."

"But, mamma, he will rise. You don't know how ambitious he is, and what determination he has. They have lost everything. The place that Ferdy Wickersham told me about his father owning, with its old pictures and all that, was his old home. Old Mr. Keith, since he lost it, has been farming it for Mr. Wickersham. Think of that!"

"Just so," said Mrs. Yorke. "He inherits it. They are all unpractical. Your father began life poor; but he was practical, and he had the ability to succeed."

Alice's face softened. "Dear old dad!" she said; "I must write to him." Even as she thought of him she could not but reflect how absorption in business had prevented his obtaining the culture of which this young schoolteacher had given her a glimpse, and had

crushed, though it could not wholly quench, the kindliness which lived in his big heart.

Though Alice defended Keith, she felt in her heart there was some truth in her mother's estimate. He was too romantic. She soon had proof of it.

General Keith came up to the Ridge just then to see Gordon. At least, he gave this out as the reason for his visit, and Gordon did not know until afterwards that there was another reason for it—that he had been in correspondence for some time with Dr. Balsam. He was looking thin; but when Gordon spoke of it, he put it by with a smile.

"Oh, I am very well. We need not worry about my troubles. I have but two: that old wound, and Old Age; both are incurable."

Gordon was very pleased to have the opportunity to introduce his father to Mrs. Yorke and Miss Alice. As he scanned the thin, fine face with its expression of calm and its lines of fortitude, he felt that it was a good card to play. His resemblance to the man-in-armor that hung in the old dining-room had increased.

The General and Miss Alice promptly became great friends. He treated her with a certain distinction that pleased her. Mrs. Yorke, too,

was both pleased and flattered by his gracious manner. She was, however, more critical toward him than her daughter was.

General Keith soon discovered Gordon's interest in the young girl. It was not difficult to discover, for every moment of his spare time was devoted to her in some way. The General observed them with a quiet smile in his eyes. Now and then, however, the smile died out as he heard Gordon expressing views which were somewhat new to him. One evening they were all seated on the verandah together, and Gordon began to speak of making a fortune as a high aim. He had heard Mrs. Yorke express the same sentiments a few days before.

"My son," said his father, gently, looking at him with grave eyes, "a fortune is a great blessing in the hands of the man who knows how to spend it. But riches considered as something to possess or to display is one of the most despicable and debasing of all the aims that men can have."

Mrs. Yorke's eyes opened wide and her face hardened a little. Gordon thought of the toil and patience it had cost him to make even his little salary, and wealth appeared to him just then a very desirable acquisition.

"Why, father," he said, "it opens the world to a man. It gives such great opportunities for everything; travel, knowledge, art, science, power, the respect and esteem of the world, are obtained by it."

Something like this Mrs. Yorke had said to him, meaning, kindly enough, to encourage him in its pursuit.

The old General smiled gravely.

"Opportunity for travel and the acquirement of knowledge wealth undoubtedly gives, but happily they are not dependent upon wealth, my son. The Columbuses of science, the Galileos, Newtons, Keplers; the great benefactors of the world, the great inventors, the great artists, the great poets, philosophers, and statesmen have few of them been rich."

"He appears to have lived in another world, mamma," said Alice when he had left. "He is an old dear. I never knew so unworldly a person."

Mrs. Yorke's chin tilted a little.

"Now, Alice, don't you be silly. He lives in another world now, and certainly, of all the men I know, none appears less fitted to cope with this world. The only real people to him appear to be those whom he has read of. He never tried wealth."

"He used to be rich—very rich. Don't you remember what that lady told you?"

"I don't believe it," said Mrs. Yorke, sententiously.

Alice knew that this closed the argument. When her mother in such cases said she did not believe a thing, it meant that the door of her mind was fast shut and no reason could get into it.

Mrs. Yorke could not but notice that some change had taken place in Alice of late. In a way she had undoubtedly improved. She was more serious, more thoughtful of Mrs. Yorke herself, less wilful. Yet it was not without some misgiving that Mrs. Yorke noted the change.

She suddenly had her eyes opened. Mrs. Nailor, one of her New York friends, performed this amiable office. She assigned the possible cause, though not directly—Mrs. Nailor rarely did things directly. She was a small, purring lady, with a tilt of the head, and an insinuating voice of singular clearness, with a question-mark in it. She was of a very good family, lived in a big house on Murray Hill, and had as large a circle of acquaintance as any one in New York. She prided herself on knowing everybody worth knowing, and everything about everybody. She was not lacking in

amiability; she was, indeed, so amiable that she would slander almost any absent friend to please one who was present. She had a little grudge against Keith, for she had been struck from the first by his bright eyes and good manners; but Keith had been so much engrossed by his interest in Alice Yorke that he had been remiss in paying Mrs. Nailor that attention which she felt her position required. Mrs. Nailor now gave Mrs. Yorke a judicious hint.

"You have such a gift for knowing people?" she said to her, "and your daughter is so like you?" She showed her even teeth.

Mrs. Yorke was not quite sure what she meant, and she answered somewhat coldly that she was glad that Mrs. Nailor thought so. Mrs. Nailor soon indicated her meaning.

"The young schoolmaster—he is a schoolmaster in whom your daughter is interested, isn't he? Yes? He appears so well-read? He brought your daughter down the mountain the day her horse ran off with her? So romantic to make an acquaintance that way—I quite envy you? There is so little real romance these days! It is delightful to find it?" She sighed, and Mrs. Yorke thought of Daniel Nailor and his

little bald head and round mouth. "Yes, I quite envy you—and your daughter. Who is he?"

Mrs. Yorke said he was of a very old and distinguished family. She gave him a pedigree that would have done honor to a Derby-winner.

"I am so glad," declared Mrs. Nailor. "I knew he must be, of course. I am sure you would never encourage such an intimacy unless he were?" She smiled herself off, leaving Mrs. Yorke fuming.

"That woman is always sticking pins into people," she said to herself. But this pin had stuck fast, and Mrs. Yorke was in quite a panic.

Mrs. Yorke determined to talk to Alice on the first occasion that offered itself; but she would not do it too abruptly. All that would be needed would be a hint judiciously given. For surely a girl of such sound sense as Alice, a girl brought up so wisely, could not for a moment think of acting so foolishly. And really Mrs. Yorke felt that she herself was very fond of this young man. She might do something for him—something that should be of use to him in after life. At first this plan took the form in her mind of getting her husband to give him a place; but she reflected that this would necessitate bringing him where his acquaintance with

them might prove inconvenient. She would aid him in going to college for another year. This would be a delicate way to discharge the obligation under which his kindness had placed her.

Keith, meantime, was happily ignorant of the plot that was forming against him. The warm weather was coming, and he knew that before long Mrs. Yorke and Alice would be flitting northward. However, he would make his hay while the sun shone for him. So one afternoon Keith had borne Miss Alice off to his favorite haunt, the high rock in the Ridge woods. He was in unusual spirits; for he had escaped from Mrs. Nailor, who of late had appeared to be rather lying in wait for him. It was the spot he loved best; for the pines behind him seemed to shut out the rest of the world, and he felt that here he was in some sort nearer to having Alice for his own than anywhere else. It was here that he had caught that glimpse of her heart which he felt had revealed her to him.

This afternoon he was talking of love and of himself; for what young man who talks of love talks not of himself? She was dressed in white, and a single red rose that he had given her was stuck in her dress. He had been reading a poem to her. It contained a picture of

the goddess of love, decked out for "worship without end." The book now lay at his side, and he was stretched at her feet.

"If I ever am in love," he said suddenly, "it will be with a girl who must fill full the measure of my dreams." He was looking away through the pine-trees to the sky far beyond; but the soft light in his face came not from that far-off tent of blue. He was thinking vaguely how much bluer than the sky were her eyes.

"Yes?" Her tone was tender.

"She must be a beauty, of course." He gazed at her with that in his eyes which said, as plainly as words could have said it, "You are beautiful."

But she was looking away, wondering to herself who it might be.

"I mean she must have what *I* call beauty," he added by way of explanation. "I don't count mere red and white beauty. Phrony Tripper has that." This was not without intention. Alice had spoken of Phrony's beauty one day when she saw her at the school.

"But she is very pretty," asserted the girl, "so fresh and such color!"

"Oh, pretty! yes; and color—a wine-sap apple has color. But I am speaking of real

beauty, the beauty of the rose, the freshness that you cannot define, that holds fragrance, a something that you love, that you feel even more than you see."

She thought of a school friend of hers, Louise Caldwell, a tall, statuesque beauty, with whom another friend, Norman Wentworth, was in love, and she wondered if Keith would think her such a beauty as he described.

"She must be sweet," he went on, thinking to himself for her benefit. "I cannot define that either, but you know what I mean?"

She decided mentally that Louise Caldwell would not fill his measure.

"It is something that only some girls have in common with some flowers—violets, for instance."

"Oh, I don't care for sweet girls very much," she said, thinking of another schoolmate whom the girls used to call *eau sucré*.

"You do," he said positively. "I am not talking of that kind. It is womanliness and gentleness, fragrance, warmth, beauty, everything."

"Oh, yes. That kind?" she said acquiescingly. "Well, go on; you expect to find a good deal."

"I do," he said briefly, and sat up. "I expect to find the best."

She glanced at him with new interest. He was very good-looking when he was spirited. And his eyes now were full of light.

"Well, beauty and sweetness," she said; "what else? I must know, for I may have to help you find her. There don't appear to be many around Ridgely, since you have declined to accept the only pretty girl I have seen."

"She must be good and true. She must know the truth as—" His eye fell at that instant on a humming-bird, a gleaming jewel of changing sapphire that, poised on half-invisible wings, floated in a bar of sunlight before a sprig of pink honeysuckle. "—As that bird knows the flowers where the honey lies."

"Where do you expect to find this paragon?"

As if in answer, the humming-bird suddenly caught sight of the red rose in her dress, and, darting to it, thrust its bill deep into the crimson heart of the flower. They both gave an exclamation of delighted wonder.

"I have found her," he said firmly, leaning a little toward her, with mantling cheeks and close-drawn lips, his glowing eyes on her face. "The bird has found her for me."

The bird darted away.

"Ah, it is gone! What will you give her in return?" She turned to him and spoke half mockingly, wishing to get off such delicate ground.

He turned and gazed into her eyes.

"'Worship without end.'" There was that in his face that made her change color. She looked away and began to think of her own ideal. She found that her idea of the man she loved had been of height of figure and breadth of shoulders, a handsome face and fashionable attire. She had pictured him as tall and straight, taller than this boy and larger every way, with a straight nose, brown eyes, and dark hair. But chiefly she had thought of the style of his clothes. She had fancied the neckties he should wear, and the pins that should be stuck in them. He must be brave, of course, a beautiful dancer, a fine tennis-player. She had once thought that black-eyed, handsome young Ferdy Wickersham was as near her ideal as any one else she knew. He led germans divinely. But he was selfish, and she had never admired him as much as another man, who was less showy, but was, she knew, more of a man: Norman Wentworth, a bold swimmer, a good horse-

man, and a leader of their set. It suddenly occurred to her now how much more like this man Norman Wentworth was than Ferdy Wickersham, and following her thought of the two, she suddenly stepped up on a higher level and was conscious of a certain elation, much like that she had had the day she had climbed up before Gordon Keith on the out-jutting rock and looked far down over the wide expanse of forest and field, to where his home had been.

She sat for a little while in deep reflection. Presently she said, quite gravely and a little shyly:

"You know, I am not a bit what you think I am. Why, you treat me as if I were a superior being. And I am not; I am a very matter-of-fact girl."

He interrupted her with a gesture of dissent, his eyes full of light.

"Nonsense! You don't know me, you don't know men, or you would know that any girl is the superior of the best man," he reiterated.

"You don't know girls," she retorted.

"I know one, at least," he said, with a smile that spoke his admiration.

"I am not sure that you do," she persisted,

speaking slowly and very seriously. She was gazing at him in a curious, reflective way.

"The one I know is good enough for me." He leaned over and shyly took her hand and raised it to his lips, then released it. She did not resist him, but presently she said tentatively:

"I believe I had rather be treated as I am than as something I am not. I like you too much to want to deceive you, and I think you are deceived."

He, of course, protested that he was not deceived. He "knew perfectly well," he said. She was not convinced; but she let it go. She did not want to quarrel with him for admiring her.

That afternoon, when Alice came in, her manner was so different from what it had been of late that her mother could not but observe it. One moment she was distraite; the next she was impatient and even irritable; then this mood changed, and she was unusually gay; her cheeks glowed and her eyes sparkled; but even as she reflected, a change came, and she drifted away again into a brown study.

Next day, while Mrs. Yorke was still considering what to do, a card was handed her. It

was a name written simply on one of the slips of paper that were kept on the hotel counter below. Keith of late had not been sending up his card; a servant simply announced his name. This, then, decided her. It was the most fortunate thing in the world that Alice had gone off and was out of the way. It gave Mrs. Yorke the very opportunity she desired. If, as she divined, the young man wished to talk to her about anything personal, she would speak kindly to him, but so plainly that he could never forget it. After all, it would be true kindness to him to do so. She had a virtuous feeling as she smoothed her hair before a mirror.

He was not in the sitting-room when she came down; so she sought for him on one of the long verandahs where they usually sat. He was seated at the far end, where he would be more or less secluded, and she marched down on him. He was evidently on the watch for her, and as soon as she appeared he rose from his seat. She had made up her mind very clearly what she would say to him; but as she approached him it was not so easy to say as she had fancied it. There was something in his bearing and expression that deterred her from using the rather condescending words she had formu-

lated. His face was somewhat pale; his mouth was firmly set, throwing out the chin in a way to make it quite strong; his eyes were anxious, but steady, his form was very erect, and his shoulders were very square and straight. He appeared to her older than she had considered him. It would not do to patronize this man. After greeting her, he handed her a chair solemnly, and the next moment plunged straight into his subject. It was so sudden that it almost took her breath away; and before she knew it he had, with the blood coming and going in his cheeks, declared his love for her daughter, and asked permission to pay her his addresses. After the first gulp or two he had lost his embarrassment, and was speaking in a straightforward, manly way. The color had come rushing back into his face, and his eyes were filled with light. Mrs. Yorke felt that it was necessary to do something. So, though she felt some trepidation, she took heart and began to answer him. As she proceeded, her courage returned to her, and seeing that he was much disturbed, she became quite composed.

She regretted extremely, she said, that she had not foreseen this. It was all so unexpected to her that she was quite overwhelmed by it.

She felt that this was a lie, and she was not sure that he did not know it. Of course, it was quite impossible that she could consent to anything like what he had proposed.

"Do you mean because she is from the North and I am from the South?" he asked earnestly.

"No; of course not. I have Southern blood myself. My grandmother was from the South." She smiled at his simplicity.

"Then why?"

This was embarrassing, but she must answer.

"Why, you—we—move in—quite different—spheres, and—ah, it's really not to be thought of, Mr. Keith," she said, half desperately.

He himself had thought of the different spheres in which they moved, but he had surmounted that difficulty. Though her father, as he had learned, had begun life as a store-boy, and her mother was not the most learned person in the world, Alice Yorke was a lady to her finger-tips, and in her own fine person was the incontestable proof of a strain of gentle blood somewhere. Those delicate features, fine hands, trim ankles, and silken hair told their own story.

So he came near saying, "That does not make any difference"; but he restrained himself. He

said instead, "I do not know that I understand you."

It was very annoying to have to be so plain, but it was, Mrs. Yorke felt, quite necessary.

"Why, I mean that my daughter has always moved in the—the most—exclusive society; she has had the best advantages, and has a right to expect the best that can be given her."

"Do you mean that you think my family is not good enough for your daughter?"

There was a tone in his quiet voice that made her glance up at him, and a look on his face that made her answer quickly:

"Oh, no; not that, of course. I have no doubt your family is—indeed, I have heard it is—ur—. But my daughter has every right to expect the best that life can give. She has a right to expect—an—establishment."

"You mean money?" Keith asked, a little hoarsely.

"Why, not in the way in which you put it; but what money stands for—comforts, luxuries, position. Now, don't go and distress yourself about this. You are nothing but a silly boy. You fancy yourself in love with my daughter because she is the only pretty girl about here."

"She is not; but she is the prettiest I know," ejaculated Keith, bitterly.

"You think that, and so you fancy you are in love with her."

"It is no fancy; I am," asserted Keith, doggedly. "I would be in love with her if she were as ugly as—as she is beautiful."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't," declared Mrs. Yorke, coolly. "Now, the thing for you to do is to forget all about her, as she will in a short time forget all about you."

"I know she will, though I hope she will not," groaned the young man. "I shall never forget her—never."

His voice and manner showed such unfeigned anguish that the lady could not but feel real commiseration for him, especially as he appeared to be accepting her view of the case. She glanced at him almost kindly.

"Is there nothing I can do for you? I should like very much to do something—something to show my appreciation of what you have done for us to make our stay here less dreary than it would have been."

"Thank you. There is nothing," said Keith. "I am going to turn my attention now to—get-

ting an establishment." He spoke half sarcastically, but Mrs. Yorke did not see it.

"That is right," she said warmly.

"It is not right," declared Keith, with sudden vehemence. "It is all wrong. I know it is all wrong."

"What the world thinks is right can't be all wrong." Mrs. Yorke spoke decisively.

"When are you going away?" the young man asked suddenly.

"In a few days." She spoke vaguely, but even as she spoke, she determined to leave next day.

"I thank you for all your kindness to me," said Keith, standing very straight and speaking rather hoarsely.

Mrs. Yorke's heart smote her. If it were not for her daughter's welfare she could have liked this boy and befriended him. A vision came to her from out of the dim past; a country boy with broad shoulders suddenly flashed before her; but she shut it off before it became clear. She spoke kindly to Keith, and held out her hand to him with more real sincerity than she had felt in a long time.

"You are a good boy," she said, "and I wish I could have answered you otherwise, but it

would have been simple madness. You will some day know that it was kinder to you to make you look nakedly at facts."

"I suppose so," said Keith, politely. "But some day, Mrs. Yorke, you shall hear of me. If you do not, remember I shall be dead."

With this bit of tragedy he turned and left her, and Mrs. Yorke stood and watched him as he strode down the path, meaning, if he should turn, to wave him a friendly adieu, and also watching lest that which she had dreaded for a quarter of an hour might happen. It would be dreadful if her daughter should meet him now. He did not turn, however, and when at last he disappeared, Mrs. Yorke, with a sigh of relief, went up to her room and began to write rapidly.

CHAPTER X

MRS. YORKE CUTS A KNOT

WHEN Alice Yorke came from her jaunt, she had on her face an expression of pleasant anticipation. She had been talking to Dr. Balsam, and he had said things about Gordon Keith that had made her cheeks tingle. "Of the best blood of two continents," he had said of him. "He has the stuff that has made England and America." The light of real romance was beginning to envelop her.

As she entered the hall she met Mrs. Nailor. Mrs. Nailor smiled at her knowingly, much as a cat, could she smile, might smile at a mouse.

"I think your mother is out on the far end of the verandah. I saw her there a little while ago talking with your friend, the young schoolmaster. What a nice young man he is? Quite uncommon, isn't he?"

Alice gave a little start. "The young schoolmaster" indeed!

"Yes, I suppose so. I don't know." She hated Mrs. Nailor with her quiet, cat-like manner and inquisitive ways. She now hated her more than ever, for she was conscious that she was blushing and that Mrs. Nailor observed it.

"Your mother is very interested in schools? Yes? I think that is nice in her? So few persons appreciate education?" Her air was absolute innocence.

"I don't know. I believe she is—interested in everything," faltered Alice. She wanted to add, "And so you appear to be also."

"So few persons care for education these days," pursued Mrs. Nailor, in a little chime. "And that young man is such a nice fellow? Has he a good school? I hear you were there? You are interested in schools, too?" She nodded like a little Japanese toy-baby.

"I am sure I don't know. Yes; I think he has. Why don't you go?" asked the girl at random.

"Oh, I have not been invited." Mrs. Nailor smiled amiably. "Perhaps, you will let me go with you sometime?"

Alice escaped, and ran up-stairs, though she was eager to go out on the porch. However, it would serve him right to punish him by stay-

ing away until she was sent for, and she could not go with Mrs. Nailor's cat-eyes on her.

She found her mother seated at a table writing busily. Mrs. Yorke only glanced up and said, "So you are back? Hope you had a pleasant time?" and went on writing.

Alice gazed at her with a startled look in her eyes. She had such a serious expression on her face.

"What are you doing?" She tried to speak as indifferently as she could.

"Writing to your father." The pen went on busily.

"What is the matter? Is papa ill? Has anything happened?"

"No; nothing has happened. I am writing to say we shall be home the last of the week."

"Going away!"

"Yes; don't you think we have been here long enough? We only expected to stay until the last of March, and here it is almost May."

"But what is the matter? Why have you made up your mind so suddenly? Mamma, you are so secret! I am sure something is the matter. Is papa not well?" She crossed over and stood by her mother.

Mrs. Yorke finished a word and paused a mo-

ment, with the end of her silver penholder against her teeth.

"Alice," she said reflectively, "I have something I want to say to you, and I have a mind to say it now. I think I ought to speak to you very frankly."

"Well, for goodness' sake, do, mamma; for I'm dying to know what has happened." She seated herself on the side of a chair for support. Her face was almost white.

"Alice—"

"Yes, mamma." Her politeness was ominous.

"Alice, I have had a talk with that young man—"

Alice's face flushed suddenly.

"What young man?" she asked, as though the Ridge Springs were thronged with young men behind every bush.

"That young man—Mr. Keith," firmly.

"Oh!" said Alice. "With Mr. Keith? Yes, mamma?" Her color was changing quickly now.

"Yes, I have had a quite—a very extraordinary conversation with Mr. Keith." As Mrs. Yorke drifted again into reflection, Alice was compelled to ask:

"What about, mamma?"

"About you."

"About me? What about me?" Her face was belying her assumed innocence.

"Alice, I hope you are not going to behave foolishly. I cannot believe for a minute that you would—a girl brought up as you have been—so far forget yourself—would allow yourself to become interested in a perfectly unknown and ignorant and obscure young man."

"Why, mamma, he is not ignorant; he knows more than any one I ever saw,—why, he has read piles of books I never even heard of,—and his family is one of the best and oldest in this country. His grandfathers or great-grandfathers were both signers of the Decla—"

"I am not talking about that," interrupted Mrs. Yorke, hastily. "I must say you appear to have studied his family-tree pretty closely."

"Dr. Balsam told me," interjected Alice.

"Dr. Balsam had very little to talk of. I am talking of his being unknown."

"But I believe he will be known some day. You don't know how clever and ambitious he is. He told me—"

But Mrs. Yorke had no mind to let Alice dwell

on what he had told her. He was too good an advocate.

"Stuff! I don't care what he told you! Alice, he is a perfectly unknown and untrained young—creature. All young men talk that way. He is perfectly gauche and boorish in his manner—"

"Why, mamma, he has beautiful manners!" exclaimed Alice. "I heard a lady saying the other day he had the manners of a Chesterfield."

"Chester-nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Yorke.

"I think he has, too, mamma."

"I don't agree with you," declared Mrs. Yorke, energetically. "How would he appear in New York? Why, he wears great heavy shoes, and his neckties are something dreadful."

"His neckties are bad," admitted Alice, sadly.

Mrs. Yorke, having discovered a breach in her adversary's defences, like a good general directed her attack against it.

"He dresses horribly; he wears his hair like a—countryman; and his manners are as antiquated as his clothes. Think of him at the opera or at one of Mrs. Wentworth's receptions!

He says 'madam' and 'sir' as if he were a servant."

"I got after him about that once," said the girl, reflectively. "I said that only servants said that."

"Well, what did he say?"

"Said that that proved that servants sometimes had better manners than their masters."

"Well, I must say, I think he was excessively rude!" asserted Mrs. Yorke, picking up her fan and beginning to fan rapidly.

"That's what I said; but he said he did not see how it could be rude to state a simple and impersonal fact in a perfectly respectful way."

Alice was warming up in defence and swept on.

"He said the new fashion was due to people who were not sure of their own position, and were afraid others might think them servile if they employed such terms."

"What does he know about fashion?"

"He says fashion is a temporary and shifting thing, sometimes caused by accident and sometimes made by tradesmen, but that good manners are the same to-day that they were hundreds of years ago, and that though the ways in which they are shown change, the basis

is always the same, being kindness and gentility."

Mrs. Yorke gasped.

"Well, I must say, you seem to have learned your lesson!" she exclaimed.

Alice had been swept on by her memory not only of the words she was repeating, but of many conversations and interchanges of thought Gordon Keith and she had had during the past weeks, in which he had given her new ideas. She began now, in a rather low and unsteady voice, her hands tightly clasped, her eyes in her lap:

"Mamma, I believe I like him very much—better than I shall ever—"

"Nonsense, Alice! Now, I will not have any of this nonsense. I bring you down here for your health, and you take up with a perfectly obscure young countryman about whom you know nothing in the world, and—"

"I know all about him, mamma. I know he is a gentleman. His grandfather—"

"You know *nothing* about him," asserted Mrs. Yorke, rising. "You may be married to a man for years and know very little of him. How can you know about this boy? You will go back and forget all about him in a week."

"I shall never forget him, mamma," said Alice, in a low tone, thinking of the numerous promises she had made to the same effect within the past few days.

"Fiddlesticks! How often have you said that? A half-dozen times at least. There's Norman and Ferdy Wickersham and—"

"I have not forgotten them," said Alice, a little impressed by her mother's argument.

"Of course, you have not. I don't think it's right, Alice, for you to be so—susceptible and shallow. At least once every three months I have to go through this same thing. There's Ferdy Wickersham—handsome, elegant manners, very ri—with fine prospects every way, devoted to you for ever so long. I don't care for his mother, but his people are now received everywhere. Why—?"

"Mamma, I would not marry Ferdy Wickersham if he were the last man in—to save his life—not for ten millions of dollars. And he does not care for me."

"Why, he is perfectly devoted to you," insisted Mrs. Yorke.

"Ferdy Wickersham is not perfectly devoted to any one except himself—and never will be,"

asserted Alice, vehemently. "If he ever cared for any one it is Louise Caldwell."

Mrs. Yorke shifted her ground.

"There's Norman Wentworth? One of the best—"

"Ah! I don't love Norman. I never could. We are the best of friends, but I just like and respect him."

"Respect is a very safe ground to marry on," said Mrs. Yorke, decisively. "Some people do not have even that when they marry."

"Then I am sorry for them," said Miss Alice. "But when I marry, I want to love. I think it would be a crime to marry a man you did not love. God made us with a capacity to form ideals, and if we deliberately fall below them—"

Mrs. Yorke burst out laughing.

"Oh, stuff! That boy has filled your head with enough nonsense to last a lifetime. I would not be such a parrot. I want to finish my letter now."

Mrs. Yorke concluded her letter, and two mornings later the Yorkes took the old two-horse stage that plied between the Springs and the little grimy railway-station, ten miles away at the foot of the Ridge, and metaphorically

shook the dust of Ridgely from their feet, though, from their appearance when they reached the railway, it, together with much more, must have settled on their shoulders.

The road passed the little frame school-house, and as the stage rattled by, the young school-teacher's face changed. He stood up and looked out of the window with a curious gaze in his burning eyes. Suddenly his face lit up: a little head under a very pretty hat had nodded to him. He bowed low, and went back to his seat with a new expression. That bow chained him for years. He almost forgave her high-headed mother.

Alice bore away with her a long and tragic letter which she did not think it necessary to confide to her mother at this time, in view of the fact that the writer declared that in his present condition he felt bound to recognize her mother's right to deny his request to see her; but that he meant to achieve such success that she would withdraw her prohibition, and to return some day and lay at her feet the highest honors life could give.

A woman who has discarded a man is, perhaps, nearer loving him just afterwards than ever before. Certainly Miss Alice Yorke

thought more tenderly of Gordon Keith when she found herself being borne away from him than she had ever done during the weeks she had known him.

It is said that a broken heart is a most valuable possession for a young man. Perhaps, it was so to Keith.

The rest of the session dragged wearily for him. But he worked like fury. He would succeed. He would rise. He would show Mrs. Yorke who he was.

Mrs. Yorke, having reached home, began at once to lead her daughter back to what she esteemed a healthier way of thinking than she had fallen into. This opportunity came in the shape of a college commencement with a consequent boat-race, and all the gayeties that this entailed.

Mrs. Yorke was, in her way, devoted to her daughter, and had a definite and what she deemed an exalted ambition for her. This meant that she should be the best-dressed girl in society, should be a belle, and finally should make the most brilliant marriage of her set—to wit, the wealthiest marriage. She had dreamed at times of a marriage that should make her friends wild with envy—of a title, a

high title. Alice had beauty, style, wealth, and vivacity; she would grace a coronet, and mamma would be "Madam, the Countess's mother." But mamma encountered an unexpected obstacle.

When Mrs. Yorke, building her air-castles, casually let fall her idea of a title for Alice, there was a sudden and unexpected storm from an unlooked-for quarter. Dennis Yorke, usually putty in his wife's hands, had two or three prejudices that were principles with him. As to these he was rock. His daughter was his idol.

For her, from the time she had opened her blue eyes on him and blinked at him vaguely, he had toiled and schemed until his hair had turned from brown to gray and then had disappeared from his round, strongly set head. For the love he bore her he had served longer than Jacob served for Rachel, and the time had not appeared long. The suggestion that the money he had striven for from youth to age should go to some reprobate foreigner, to pay his gambling debts, nearly threw him into a convulsion. His ancestors had been driven from home to starve in the wilderness by such creatures. "Before any d—d foreign reprobate should

have a dollar of his money he would endow a lunatic asylum with it.'' So Mrs. Yorke prudently refrained from pressing this subject any further at this time, and built her hopes on securing the next most advantageous alliance—a wealthy one. She preferred Norman Wentworth to any of the other young men, for he was not only rich, but the Wentworths were an old and established house, and Mrs. Wentworth was one of the old aristocrats of the State, whose word was law above that of even the wealthiest of the new leaders. To secure Norman Wentworth would be ''almost as good as a title.'' An intimacy was sedulously cultivated with ''dear Mrs. Wentworth,'' and Norman, the ''dear boy,'' was often brought to the house.

Perversely, he and Alice did not take to each other in the way Mrs. Yorke had hoped. They simply became the best of friends, and Mrs. Yorke had the mortification of seeing a tall and statuesque schoolmate of Alice's capture Norman, while Alice appeared totally indifferent to him. What made it harder to bear was that Mrs. Caldwell, Louise Caldwell's mother, a widow with barely enough to live respectably on, was quietly walking off with the prize which Mrs. Yorke and a number of other mothers were

striving to secure, and made no more of it than if it had been her right. It all came of her family connections. That was the way with those old families. They were so selfishly exclusive and so proud. They held themselves superior to every one else and appeared to despise wealth. Mrs. Yorke did not believe Mrs. Caldwell really did despise wealth, but she admitted that she made a very good show of doing it.

Mrs. Yorke, foreseeing her failure with Norman Wentworth, was fain to accept in his place Ferdy Wickersham, who, though certainly not Norman's equal in some respects, was his superior in others.

To be sure, Ferdy was said to be a somewhat reckless young fellow, and Mr. Yorke did not fancy him; but Mrs. Yorke argued, "Boys will be boys, and you know, Mr. Yorke, you have told me you were none too good yourself." On this, Dennis Yorke growled that a man was "a fool ever to tell his wife anything of the kind, and that, at least, he never was in that young Wickersham's class."

All of which Mrs. Yorke put aside, and sacrificed herself unstintedly to achieve success for her daughter and compel her to forget the little

episode of the young Southern schoolmaster, with his tragic air.

Ah, the dreams of the climbers! How silly they are! Golden clouds at the top, and just as they are reached, some little Jack comes along and chops down the bean-stalk, clouds and all.

So, Mrs. Yorke dreamed, and, a trifle anxious over Alice's persistent reference to the charms of Spring woods and a Southern climate, after a week or two of driving down-town and eager choosing of hats and wearying fitting of dresses, started off with the girl on the yacht of Mr. Lancaster, a wealthy, dignified, and cultivated friend of her husband's. He had always been fond of Alice, and now got up a yacht-party for her to see the boat-race.

Keith had thought that the time when he should leave the region where he had been immersed so long would be the happiest hour of his life. Yet, when the day came, he was conscious of a strange tugging at his heart. These people whom he was leaving, and for whom he had in his heart an opinion very like contempt on account of their ignorance and narrowness, appeared to him a wholly different folk. There

was barely one of them but had been kind to him. Hard they might appear and petty; but they lived close together, and, break through the crust, one was sure to find a warm heart and often a soft one.

He began to understand Dr. Balsam's speech: "I have lived in several kinds of society, and I like the simplest best. One can get nearer to men here. I do not ask gratitude. I get affection."

Keith had given notice that the school would close on a certain day. The scholars always dropped off as summer came, to work in the crops; and the attendance of late had been slim. This last day he hardly expected to have half a dozen pupils. To his surprise, the schoolhouse was filled.

Even Jake Dennison, who had been off in the mountains for some little time getting out timber, was on hand, large and good-humored, sitting beside Phrony Tripper in her pink ribbons, and fanning her hard enough to keep a mine fresh. A little later in the day quite a number of the fathers and mothers of the children arrived in their rickety vehicles. They had come to take leave of the young teacher. There were almost as many as were present at the school

celebration. Keith was quite overcome, and when the hour arrived for closing the school, instead of, as he had expected, tying up the half-dozen books he kept in his desk, shaking hands with the dozen children eager to be turned loose in the delightful pasturage of summer holiday, turning the key in the lock, and plodding alone down the dusty road to Squire Rawson's, he now found the school-room full, not of school-children only, but of grown people as well. He had learned that they expected him to say something, and there was nothing for him to do but to make the effort. For an hour, as he sat during the last lessons,—which were in the nature of a review,—the pages before him had been mere blurred spaces of white, and he had been cogitating what he should say. Yet, when he rose, every idea that he had tried so faithfully to put into shape fled from his brain.

Dropping all the well-turned phrases which he had been trying to frame, he said simply that he had come there two years before with the conceit of a young man expecting to teach them a good deal, and that he went away feeling that he had taught very little, but that he had learned a great deal; he had learned that the kindest people in the world lived in that region;

he should never forget their kindness and should always feel that his best friends were there. A few words more about his hopes for the school and his feeling for the people who had been so good to him, and he pronounced the school closed. To his surprise, at a wink from Squire Rawson, one of the other trustees, who had formerly been opposed to Keith, rose, and, addressing the assemblage, began to say things about him that pleased him as much as they astonished him.

He said that they, too, had begun with some doubt as to how things would work, as one "could never tell what a colt would do till he got the harness on him," but this colt had "turned out to be a pretty good horse." Mr. Keith, maybe, had taught more than he knew. He had taught some folks—this with a cut of his eye over toward where Jake Dennison sat big and brown in the placid content of a young giant, fanning Euphronia for life—he had "taught some folks that a door had to be right strong to keep out a teacher as knowed his business." Anyhow, they were satisfied with him, and the trustees had voted to employ him another year, but he had declined. He had "business" that would take him away. Some thought

they knew that business. (At this there was a responsive titter throughout the major portion of the room, and Gordon Keith was furious with himself for finding that he suddenly turned hot and red.) He himself, the speaker said, didn't pretend to know anything about it, but he wanted to say that if Mr. Keith didn't find the business as profitable as he expected, the trustees had determined to hold the place open for him for one year, and had elected a successor temporarily to hold it in case he should want to come back.

At this there was a round of approval, as near general applause as that stolid folk ever indulged in.

Keith spent the next day in taking leave of his friends.

His last visit that evening was to Dr. Balsam. He had not been to the village often in the evening since Mrs. Yorke and her daughter had left the place. Now, as he passed up the walk, the summer moonlight was falling full on the white front of the little hotel. The slanting moonlight fell on the corner of the verandah where he had talked so often to Alice Yorke as she lay reclining on her lounge, and where he had had that last conversation with Mrs. Yorke, and

Keith saw a young man leaning over some one enveloped in white, half reclining in an armchair. He wondered if the same talk were going on that had gone on there before that evening when Mrs. Yorke had made him look nakedly at Life.

When Keith stated his errand, the Doctor looked almost as grave as he could have done had one of his cherished patients refused to respond to his most careful treatment.

"One thing I want to say to you," he said presently. "You have been eating your heart out of late about something, and it is telling on you. Give it up. Give that girl up. You will have to sooner or later. They will prove too strong for you. Even if you do not, she will not suit you; you will not get the woman you are after. She is an attractive young girl, but she will not remain so. A few years in fashionable society will change her. It is the most corroding life on earth!" exclaimed the Doctor, bitterly. "Convention usurps the place of every principle, and becomes the only god. She must change. All is Vanity!" repeated the Doctor, almost in a revery, his eyes resting on Keith's face.

"Well," he said, with a sigh, "if you ever

get knocked down and hurt badly, come back up here, and I will patch you up if I am living; and if not, come back anyhow. The place will heal you provided you don't take drugs. God bless you! Good-by." He walked with Keith to the outer edge of his little porch and shook hands with him again, and again said, "Good-by: God bless you!" When Keith turned at the foot of the hill and looked back, he was just reëntering his door, his spare, tall frame clearly outlined against the light within. Keith somehow felt as if he were turning his back on a landmark.

Just as Keith approached the gate on his return home, a figure rose up from a fence-corner and stood before him in the starlight.

"Good even'n', Mr. Keith." The voice was Dave Dennison's. Keith greeted him wonderingly. What on earth could have brought the boy out at that time of the night?

"Would you mind jest comin' down this a-way a little piece?"

Keith walked back a short distance. Dave was always mysterious when he had a communication to make. It was partly a sort of shyness and partly a survival of frontier craft.

Dave soon resolved Keith's doubt. "I hear

you're a-goin' away and ain't comin' back no more?''

''How did you hear that—I mean, that I am not coming back again?'' asked Keith.

''Well, you're a-sayin' good-by to everybody, same's if they were all a-goin' to die. Folks don't do that if they're a-comin' back.'' He leaned forward, and in the semi-darkness Keith was aware that he was scrutinizing his face.

''No, I do not expect to come back—to teach school again; but I hope to return some day to see my friends.''

The boy straightened up.

''Well, I wants to go with you.''

''You! Go with me?'' Keith exclaimed. Then, for fear the boy might be wounded, he said: ''Why, Dave, I don't even know where I am going. I have not the least idea in the world what I am going to do. I only know I am going away, and I am going to succeed.''

''That's right. That's all right,'' agreed the boy. ''You're a-goin' somewheres, and I want to go with you. You don't know where you're a-goin', but you're a-goin'. You know all them outlandish countries like you've been a-tellin' us about, and I don't know anything, but I want to know, and I'm a-goin' with you. Leastways,

I'm a-goin', and I'm a-goin' with you if you'll let me."

Keith's reply was anything but reassuring. He gave good reasons against Dave's carrying out his plan; but his tone was kind, and the youngster took it for encouragement.

"I ain't much account, I know," he pleaded. "I ain't *any* account in the *worl'*," he corrected himself, so that there could be no mistake about the matter. "They say at home I used to be some account—some little account—before I took to books—before I *sorter* took to books," he corrected again shamefacedly; "but since then I ain't been no manner of account. But I think—I kinder think—I could be some account if I knowed a little and could go somewheres to be account."

Keith was listening earnestly, and the boy went on:

"When you told us that word about that man Hannibal tellin' his soldiers how everything lay t'other side the mountains, I begin to see what you meant. I thought before that I knowed a lot; then I found out how durned little I did know, and since then I have tried to learn, and I mean to learn; and that's the reason I want to go with you. You know and I don't,

and you're the only one as ever made me want to know."

Keith was conscious of a flush of warm blood about his heart. It was the first-fruit of his work.

The boy broke in on his pleasant revery.

"You'll let me go?" he asked. "'Cause I'm a-goin' certain sure. I ain't a-goin' to stay here in this country no longer. See here." He pulled out an old bag and poked it into Keith's hand. "I've got sixteen dollars and twenty-three cents there. I made it, and while the other boys were spendin' theirn, I saved mine. You can pour it out and count it."

Keith said he would go and see his father about it the next day.

This did not appear to satisfy Dave.

"I'm a-goin' whether he says so or not," he burst forth. "I want to see the worl'. Don't nobody keer nothin' about me, an' I want to git out."

"Oh, yes! Why, I care about you," said Keith.

To his surprise, the boy began to whimper.

"Thankee. I'm obliged to you. I—want to go away—where Phrony ner nobody—ner anybody won't never see me no more—any more."

The truth dawned on Keith. Little Dave, too, had his troubles, his sorrows, his unrequited affections. Keith warmed to the boy.

"Phrony is a lot older than you," he said consolingly.

"No, she ain't; we are just of an age; and if she was I wouldn't keer. I'm goin' away."

Keith had to interpose his refusal to take him in such a case. He said, however, that if he could obtain his father's consent, as soon as he got settled he would send for him. On the basis of this compromise the boy went home.

CHAPTER XI

GUMBOLT

WITH the savings of his two years of school-teaching Keith found that he had enough, by practising rigid economy, to give himself another year at college, and he practised rigid economy.

He worked under the spur of ambition to show Alice Yorke and those who surrounded her that he was not a mere country clod.

With his face set steadily in the direction where stood the luminous form of the young girl he had met and come to worship amid the blossoming woods, he studied to such good purpose that at the end of the session he had packed two years' work into one.

Keith had no very definite ideas, when he started out at the end of his college year, as to what he should do. He only knew that he had strong pinions, and that the world was before him. He wished to bury himself from obser-

vation until he should secure the success with which he would burst forth on an astonished world, overwhelm Mrs. Yorke, and capture Alice. His first intention had been to go to the far West; but on consideration he abandoned the idea.

Rumors were already abroad that in the great Appalachian mountain-range opportunity might be as golden as in that greater range on the other side of the continent.

Keith had a sentiment that he would rather succeed in the South than elsewhere.

"Only get rifles out and railroads in, and capital will come pouring after them," Rhodes had said. "Old Wickersham knows his business."

That was a good while ago, and at last the awakening had begun. Now that carpet-bagging was at an end, and affairs were once more settled in that section, the wealth of the country was again being talked of in the press.

The chief centre of the new life was a day's drive farther in the mountains than Eden, the little hamlet which Keith had visited once with Dr. Balsam when he attended an old stage-driver, Gilsey by name, and cut a bullet out of what he called his "off-leg." This was the

veiled Golconda. To the original name of Humboldt the picturesque and humorous mountaineer had given the name of "Gumbolt."

This was where old Adam Rawson, stirred by the young engineer's prophecy, had taken time by the forelock and had bought up the mineral rights, and "gotten ahead" of Wickersham & Company.

Times and views change even in the Ridge region, and now, after years of delay, Wickersham & Company's railroad was about to be built. It had already reached Eden.

Keith, after a few days with his father, stopped at Ridgely to see his old friends. The Doctor looked him over with some disapproval.

"As gaunt as a greyhound," he muttered. "My patient not married yet, I suppose? Well, she will be. You'd better tear her out of your memory before she gets too firmly lodged there."

Keith boldly said he would take the chances.

When old Rawson saw him he, too, remarked on his thinness; but more encouragingly.

"Well, 'a lean dog for a long chase,'" he said.

"How are cattle?" inquired Keith.

The old fellow turned his eyes on him with a keen look.

"Cattle's tolerable. I been buyin' a considerable number up toward Gumbolt, where you're goin'. I may get you to look after 'em some day," he chuckled.

Gordon wrote to Dave Dennison that he was going to Gumbolt and would look out for him. A little later he learned that the boy had already gone there.

The means of reaching Gumbolt from Eden, the terminus of the railroad which Wickersham & Company were building, was still the stage, a survivor of the old-time mountain coach, which had outlasted all the manifold chances and changes of fortune.

Happily for Keith, he had been obliged, though it was raining, to take the outside seat by the driver, old Tim Gilsey, to whom he recalled himself, and by his coolness at "Hell-streak Hill," where the road climbed over the shoulder of the mountain along a sheer cliff, and suddenly dropped to the river below, a point where old Gilsey was wont to display his skill as a driver and try the nerves of passengers, he made the old man his friend for life.

When the stage began to ascend the next hill,

the old driver actually unbent so far as to give an account of a "hold-up" that had occurred at that point not long before, "all along of the durned railroad them Yankees was bringin' into the country," to which he laid most of the evils of the time. "For when you run a stage you know who you got with you," declared Mr. Gilsey; "but when you run a railroad you dunno who you got."

"Well, tell me about the time you were held up."

"Didn't nobody hold me up," sniffed Mr. Gilsey. "If I had been goin' to stop I wouldn't 'a' started. It was a dom fool they put up here when I was down with rheumatiz. Since then they let me pick my substitute.

"Well," he said, as a few lights twinkled below them, "there she is. Some pretty tough characters there, too. But you ain't goin' to have no trouble with 'em. All you got to do is to put the curb on 'em onct."

As Keith looked about him in Gumbolt, the morning after his arrival, he found that his new home was only a rude mining-camp, raw and rugged; a few rows of frame houses, beginning to be supplanted by hasty brick structures, stretched up the hills on the sides of unpaved

roads, dusty in dry weather and bottomless in wet. Yet it was, for its size, already one of the most cosmopolitan places in the country. Of course, the population was mainly American, and they were beginning to pour in—sharp-eyed men from the towns in black coats, and long-legged, quiet-looking and quiet-voiced mountaineers in rusty clothes, who hulked along in single file, silent and almost fugitive in the glare of daylight. Quiet they were and well-nigh stealthy, with something of the movement of other denizens of the forest, unless they were crossed and aroused, and then, like those other denizens, they were fierce almost beyond belief. A small cavil might make a great quarrel, and pistols would flash as quick as light.

The first visit that Keith received was from J. Quincy Plume, the editor of the *Gumbolt Whistle*. He had the honor of knowing his distinguished father, he said, and had once had the pleasure of being at his old home. He had seen Keith's name on the book, and had simply called to offer him any services he or his paper could render him. "There are so few gentlemen in this —— hole," he explained, "that I feel that we should all stand together." Keith, knowing J. Quincy's history, inwardly smiled.

Mr. Plume had aged since he was the speaker of the carpet-bag legislature; his black hair had begun to be sprinkled with gray, and had receded yet farther back on his high forehead; his hazel eyes were a little bleared; and his full lips were less resolute than of old. He had evidently seen bad times since he was the facile agent of the Wickersham interests. He wore a black suit and a gay necktie which had once been gayer, a shabby silk hat, and patent-leather shoes somewhat broken.

His addiction to cards and drink had contributed to Mr. Plume's overthrow, and after a disappearance from public view for some time he had turned up just as Gumbolt began to be talked of, with a small sheet somewhat larger than a pocket-handkerchief, which, in prophetic tribute to Gumbolt's future manufactures, he christened the *Gumbolt Whistle.*

Mr. Plume offered to introduce Keith to "the prettiest woman in Gumbolt," and, incidentally, to "the best cocktail" also. "Terpsichore is a nymph who practises the Terpsichorean art; indeed, I may say, presides over a number of the arts, for she has the best faro-bank in town, and the only bar where a gentleman can get a drink that will not poison a refined stomach.

She is, I may say, the leader of Gumbolt society."

Keith shook his head; he had come to work, he declared.

"Oh, you need not decline; you will have to know Terpy. I am virtue itself; in fact, I am Joseph—nowadays. You know, I belong to the cloth?" Keith's expression indicated that he had heard this fact. "But even I have yielded to her charms—intellectual, I mean, of course."

Mr. Plume withdrew after having suggested to Keith to make him a small temporary loan, or, if more convenient, to lend him the use of his name on a little piece of bank-paper "to tide over an accidental and unexpected emergency," assuring Keith that he would certainly take it up within sixty days.

Unfortunately for Keith, Plume's cordiality had made so much impression on him that he was compliant enough to lend him the use of his name, and as neither at the expiration of sixty days, nor at any other time, did Mr. Plume ever find it convenient to take up his note, Keith found himself later under the necessity of paying it himself. This circumstance, it is due to Mr. Plume to say, he always deplored, and doubtless with sincerity.

Women were at a premium in Gumbolt, and Mr. Plume was not the only person who hymned the praises of "Terpsichoar," as she was mainly called. Keith could not help wondering what sort of a creature she was who kept a dance-house and a faro-bank, and yet was spoken of with unstinted admiration and something very like respect by the crowd that gathered in the "big room of the Windsor." She must be handsome, and possibly was a good dancer, but she was no doubt a wild, coarse creature, with painted cheeks and dyed hair. The mental picture he formed was not one to interfere with the picture he carried in his heart.

Next day, as he was making a purchase in a shop, a neat and trim-looking young woman, with a fresh complexion and a mouth full of white teeth, walked in, and in a pleasant voice said, "Good mornin', all." Keith did not associate her at all with Terpsichore, but he was surprised that old Tim Gilsey should not have known of her presence in town. He was still more surprised when, after having taken a long and perfectly unabashed look at him, with no more diffidence in it than if he had been a lump of ore she was inspecting, she said:

"You're the fellow that come to town night

before last? Uncle Tim was tellin' me about you."

"Yes; I got here night before last. Who is Uncle Tim?"

"Uncle Tim Gilsey."

She walked up and extended her hand to him with the most perfect friendliness, adding, with a laugh as natural as a child's:

"We'll have to be friends; Uncle Tim says you're a white man, and that's more than some he brings over the road these days are."

"Yes, I hope so. You are Mr. Gilsey's niece? I am glad to meet you."

The young woman burst out laughing.

"Lor', *no*. I ain't anybody's niece; but he's my uncle—I've adopted *him*. I'm Terpy—Terpsichore; run Terpsichore's Hall," she said by way of explanation, as if she thought he might not understand her allusion.

Keith's breath was almost taken away. Why, she was not at all like the picture he had formed of her. She was a neat, quiet-looking young woman, with a fine figure, slim and straight and supple, a melodious voice, and laughing gray eyes.

"You must come and see me. We're to have a blow-out to-night. Come around. I'll intro-

duce you to the boys. I've got the finest ballroom in town—just finished—and three fiddles. We christen it to-night. Goin' to be the biggest thing ever was in Gumbolt."

Keith awoke from his daze.

"Thank you, but I am afraid I'll have to ask you to excuse me," he said.

"Why?" she inquired simply.

"Because I can't come. I am not much of a dancer."

She looked at him first with surprise and then with amusement.

"Are you a Methodist preacher?"

"No."

"Salvation?"

"No."

"I thought, maybe, you were like Tib Drummond, the Methodist, what's always a-preachin' ag'in' me." She turned to the storekeeper. "What do you think he says? He says he won't come and see me, and he ain't a preacher nor Salvation Army neither. But he will, won't he?"

"You bet," said the man, peeping up with a grin from behind a barrel. "If he don't, he'll be about the only one in town who don't."

"No," said Keith, pleasantly, but firmly. "I can't go."

"Oh, yes, you will," she laughed. "I'll expect you. By-by"; and she walked out of the store with a jaunty air, humming a song about the "iligint, bauld McIntyres."

The "blow-out" came off, and was honored with a column in the next issue of the *Whistle*—a column of reeking eulogy. But Keith did not attend, though he heard the wheezing of fiddles and the shouting and stamping of Terpsichore's guests deep into the night.

Keith was too much engrossed for the next few days in looking about him for work and getting himself as comfortably settled as possible to think of anything else.

If, however, he forgot the "only decent-looking woman in Gumbolt," she did not forget him. The invitation of a sovereign is equivalent to a command the world over; and Terpsichore was as much the queen regnant of Gumbolt as Her Majesty, Victoria, was Queen of England, or of any other country in her wide realm. She was more; she was absolute. She could have had any one of a half-dozen men cut the throat of any other man in Gumbolt at her bidding.

The mistress of the "Dancing Academy" had not forgotten her boast. The institution over which she presided was popular enough almost

to justify her wager. There were few men of Keith's age in Gumbolt who did not attend its sessions and pay their tribute over the green tables that stretched along the big, low room.

In fact, Miss Terpsichore was not of that class that forget either friends or foes; whatever she was she was frankly and outspokenly. Mr. Plume informed Keith that she was "down on him."

"She's got it in for you," he said. "Says she's goin' to drive you out of Gumbolt."

"Well, she will not," said Keith, with a flash in his eye.

"She is a good friend and a good foe," said the editor. "Better go and offer a pinch of incense to Diana. She is worth cultivating. You ought to see her dance."

Keith, however, had made his decision. A girl with eyes like dewy violets was his Diana, and to her his incense was offered.

A day or two later Keith was passing down the main street, when he saw the young woman crossing over at the corner ahead of him, stepping from one stone to another quite daintily. She was holding up her skirt, and showed a very neat pair of feet in perfectly fitting boots. At the crossing she stopped. As Keith passed

her, he glanced at her, and caught her eye fastened on him. She did not look away at all, and Keith inclined his head in recognition of their former meeting.

"Good morning," she said.

"Good morning." Keith lifted his hat and was passing on.

"Why haven't you been to see me?" she demanded.

Keith pretended not to hear.

"I thought I invited you to come and see me?"

Still, Keith did not answer, but he paused. His head was averted, and he was waiting until she ceased speaking to go on.

Suddenly, to his surprise, she bounded in front of him and squared her straight figure right before him.

"Did you hear what I said to you?" she demanded tempestuously.

"Yes."

"Then why don't you answer me?" Her gaze was fastened on his face. Her cheeks were flushed, her voice was imperative, and her eyes flashed.

"Because I didn't wish to do so," said Keith, calmly.

Suddenly she flamed out and poured at him a torrent of vigorous oaths. He was so taken by surprise that he forgot to do anything but wonder, and his calmness evidently daunted her.

"Don't you know that when a lady invites you to come to see her, you have to do it?"

"I have heard that," said Keith, beginning to look amused.

"You have? Do you mean to say I am not a lady?"

"Well, from your conversation, I might suppose you were a man," said Keith, half laughing.

"I will show you that I am man enough for you. Don't you know I am the boss of this town, and that when I tell you to do a thing you have to obey me?"

"No; I do not know that," said Keith. "You may be the boss of this town, but I don't have to obey you."

"Well, I will show you about it, and —— quick, too. See if I don't! I will run you out of this town, my young man."

"Oh, I don't think you will," said Keith, easily.

"Yes, I will, and quick enough, too. You look out for me."

"Good morning," said Keith, raising his hat.

The loudness of her tone and the vehemence of her manner had arrested several passers-by, who now stood looking on with interest.

"What's the matter, Terpy?" asked one of them. "What are you so peppery about? Bank busted?"

The young woman explained the matter with more fairness than Keith would have supposed.

"Oh, he is just a fool. Let him alone," said the man; whilst another added: "He'll come around, darlin'; don't you bother; and if he don't, I will."

"—— him! He's got to go. I won't let him now. You know when I say a thing it's got to be, and I mean to make him know it, too," asserted the young Amazon. "I'll have him driven out of town, and if there ain't any one here that's man enough to do it, I'll do it myself." This declaration she framed with an imprecation sufficiently strong if an oath could make it so.

That evening Tim Gilsey came in to see Keith. He looked rather grave.

"I am sorry you did not drop in, if it was for no more than to git supper," he said. "Terpy is a bad one to have against you. She's the

kindest gal in the world; but she's got a temper, and when a gal's got a temper, she's worse'n a fractious leader."

"I don't want her against me; but I'll be hanged if I will be driven into going anywhere that I don't want to go," asserted Keith.

"No, I don't say as you should," said the old driver, his eye resting on Keith with a look that showed that he liked him none the less for his pluck. "But you've got to look out. This ain't back in the settlements, and there's a plenty around here as would cut your throat for a wink of Terpy's eye. They will give you a shake for it, and if you come out of that safe it will be all right. I'll see one or two of the boys and see that they don't let 'em double up on you. A horse can't do nothin' long if he has got a double load on him, no matter what he is."

Tim strolled out, and, though Keith did not know it for some time, he put in a word for him in one or two places which stood him in good stead afterwards.

The following day a stranger came up to Keith. He was a thin man between youth and middle age, with a long face and a deep voice, and light hair that stuck up on his head. His eyes were deep-set and clear; his mouth was

grave and his chin strong. He wore a rusty black coat and short, dark trousers.

"Are you Mr. Keith?" His voice was deep and melancholy.

Keith bowed. He could not decide what the stranger was. The short trousers inclined him to the church.

"I am proud to know you, sir. I am Mr. Drummond, the Methodist preacher." He gripped Keith's hand.

Keith expressed the pleasure he had in meeting him.

"Yes, sir; I am proud to know you," repeated Mr. Drummond. "I hear you have come out on the right side, and have given a righteous reproof to that wretched dancing Jezebel who is trying to destroy the souls of the young men of this town."

Keith said that he was not aware that he had done anything of the kind. As to destroying the young men, he doubted if they could be injured by her—certainly not by dancing. In any event, he did not merit his praise.

Mr. Drummond shook his head. "Yes, sir. You are the first young man who has had the courage to withstand the wiles of that person. She is the most abandoned creature in this town;

she beguiles the men so that I can make no impression on them. Even when I am holding my meetings, I can hear the strains of her fiddles and the shouts of the ribald followers that throng her den-of-Satan. I have tried to get her to leave, but she will not go.''

Keith's reply was that he thought she had as much right there as any one, and he doubted if there were any way to meet the difficulty.

''I am sorry to hear you say that,'' said the preacher. ''I shall break up her sink of iniquity if I have to hold a revival meeting at her very door and call down brimstone and fire upon her den of wickedness.''

''If you felt so on the subject of dancing, why did you come here?'' demanded Keith. ''It seems to me that dancing is one of the least sins of Gumbolt.''

The preacher looked at him almost pensively. ''I thought it my duty. I have encountered ridicule and obloquy; but I do not mind them. I count them but dross. 'Wherever I have found the print of my Lord's shoe in the earth, there I have coveted to set my feet also.' ''

Keith bowed. The speech of Mr. Valiant-for-Truth carried its cachet with it. The stiff, awkward figure had changed. The preacher's

sincerity had lent him dignity, and his simple use of a simple tinker's words had suddenly uplifted him to a higher plane.

"Do not you think you might go about it in a less uncompromising spirit? You might succeed better and do more good," said Keith.

"No, sir; I will make no compromise with the devil—not even to succeed. Good-by. I am sorry to find you among the obdurate." As he shook hands, his jaw was set fast and his eye was burning. He strode off with the step of a soldier advancing in battle.

Keith had not long to wait to test old Gilsey's advice. He was sitting in the public room of the Windsor, a few evenings later, among the motley crew that thronged that popular resort, who were discoursing of many things, from J. Quincy Plume's last editorial on "The New Fanny Elssler," to the future of Gumbolt, when Mr. Plume himself entered. His appearance was the signal for some humor, for Mr. Plume had long passed the time when any one but himself took him seriously.

"Here comes somebody that can tell us the news," called some one. "Come in, J. Quincy, and tell us what you know."

"That would take too long," said Mr. Plume,

as he edged himself toward the stove. "You will find all the news in the *Whistle* to-morrow."

Just then another new arrival, who had pushed his way in toward the stove, said: "I will tell you a piece of news: Bill Bluffy is back."

"Come back, has he?" observed one of the company. Well, that is more interesting to J. Quincy than if the railroad had come. They are hated rivals. Since J. Quincy has taken to writing editorials on Terpy, Bill says there ain't no show for him. He threatened to kill Terp, I heard."

"Oh, I guess he has got more sense than that, drunk or sober. He had better stick to men; shootin' of women ain't popular in most parts, an' it ain't likely to get fashionable in Gumbolt, I reckon."

"He is huntin' for somebody," said the newcomer.

"I guess if he is going to get after all of Terpy's ardent admirers, he will have his hands pretty full," observed Mr. Plume—a sentiment which appeared to meet with general approval.

Just then the door opened a little roughly, and a man entered slowly whom Keith knew intuitively to be Mr. Bill Bluffy himself. He was

a young, brown-bearded man, about Keith's size, but more stockily built; his flannel shirt was laced up in front, and had a full, broad collar turned over a red necktie with long ends. His slouch-hat was set on the back of his head. The gleaming butts of two pistols that peeped out of his waistband gave a touch of piquancy to his appearance. His black eyes were restless and sparkling with excitement. He wavered slightly in his gait, and his speech was just thick enough to confirm what his appearance suggested, and what he was careful to declare somewhat superfluously, that he was "on a —— of a spree."

"I am a-huntin' for a —— furriner 'at I promised to run out of town before to-morrow mornin'. Is he in here?" He tried to stand still, but finding this difficult, advanced.

A pause fell in the conversation around the stove. Two or three of the men, after a civil enough greeting, hitched themselves into a more comfortable posture in their chairs, and it was singular, though Keith did not recall it until afterwards, that each of them showed by the movement a pistol on his right hip.

After a general greeting, which in form was nearer akin to an eternal malediction than to

anything else, Mr. Bluffy walked to the bar. Resting himself against it, he turned, and sweeping his eye over the assemblage, ordered every man in the room to walk up and take a drink with him, under penalties veiled in too terrific language to be wholly intelligible. The violence of his invitation was apparently not quite necessary, as every man in the room pulled back his chair promptly and moved toward the bar, leaving Keith alone by the stove. Mr. Bluffy had ordered drinks, when his casual glance fell on Keith standing quietly inside the circle of chairs on the other side of the stove. He pushed his way unsteadily through the men clustered at the bar.

"Why in the —— don't you come up and do what I tell you? Are you deaf?"

"No," said Keith, quietly; "but I'll get you to excuse me."

"Excuse ——! You aren't too good to drink with me, are you? If you think you are, I'll show you pretty —d quick you ain't."

Keith flushed.

"Drink with him," said two or three men in an undertone. "Or take a cigar," said one, in a friendly aside.

"Thank you, I won't drink," said Keith, yet

more gravely, his face paling a little, "and I don't care for a cigar."

"Come on, Mr. Keith," called some one.

The name caught the young bully, and he faced Keith more directly.

"Keith?— Keith!" he repeated, fastening his eyes on him with a cold glitter in them. "So you're Mr. Keith, are you?"

"That is my name," said Keith, feeling his blood tingling.

"Well, you're the man I'm a-lookin' for. No, you won't drink with me, 'cause I won't let you, you —— —— ——! You are the —— —— that comes here insultin' a lady?"

"No; I am not," said Keith, keeping his eyes on him.

"You're a liar!" said Mr. Bluffy, adding his usual expletives. "And you're the man I've come back here a-huntin' for. I promised to drive you out of town to-night if I had to go to hell a-doin' it."

His white-handled pistol was out of his waistband with a movement so quick that he had it cocked and Keith was looking down the barrel before he took in what had been done. Quickness was Mr. Bluffy's strongest card, and he had played it often.

Keith's face paled slightly. He looked steadily over the pistol, not three feet from him, at the drunken creature beyond it. His nerves grew tense, and every muscle in his frame tightened. He saw the beginning of the grooves in the barrel of the pistol and the gray cones of the bullets at the side in the cylinder; he saw the cruel, black, drunken eyes of the young desperado. It was all in a flash. He had not a chance for his life. Yes, he had.

"Let up, Bill," said a voice, coaxingly, as one might to soothe a wild beast. "Don't—"

"Drop that pistol!" said another voice, which Keith recognized as Dave Dennison's.

The desperado half glanced at the latter as he shot a volley of oaths at him. That glance saved Keith. He ducked out of the line of aim and sprang upon his assailant at the same time, seizing the pistol as he went, and turning it up just as Bluffy pulled the trigger. The ball went into the remote corner of the ceiling, and the desperado was carried off his feet by Keith's rush.

The only sounds heard in the room were the shuffling of the feet of the two wrestlers and the oaths of the enraged Bluffy. Keith had not uttered a word. He fought like a bulldog,

without noise. His effort was, while he still gripped the pistol, to bring his two hands together behind his opponent's back. A sudden relaxation of the latter's grip as he made another desperate effort to release his pistol favored Keith, and, bringing his hands together, he lifted his antagonist from his feet, and by a dexterous twist whirled him over his shoulder and dashed him with all his might, full length flat on his back, upon the floor. It was an old trick learned in his boyish days and practised on the Dennisons, and Gordon had by it ended many a contest, but never one more completely than this. A buzz of applause came from the bystanders, and more than one, with sudden friendliness, called to him to get Bluffy's pistol, which had fallen on the floor. But Keith had no need to do so, for just then a stoutly built young fellow snatched it up. It was Dave Dennison, who had come in just as the row began. He had been following up Bluffy. The desperado, however, was too much shaken to have used it immediately, and when, still stunned and breathless, he rose to his feet, the crowd was too much against him to have allowed him to renew the attack, even had he then desired it.

As for Keith, he found himself suddenly the

object of universal attention, and he might, had he been able to distribute himself, have slept in half the shacks in the camp.

The only remark Dave made on the event was characteristic:

"Don't let him git the drop on you again."

The next morning Keith found himself, in some sort, famous. "Tacklin' Bill Bluffy without a gun and cleanin' him up," as one of his new friends expressed it, was no mean feat, and Keith was not insensible to the applause it brought him. He would have enjoyed it more, perhaps, had not every man, without exception, who spoke of it given him the same advice Dave had given—to look out for Bluffy. To have to kill a man or be killed oneself is not the pleasantest introduction to one's new home; yet this appeared to Keith the dilemma in which he was placed, and as, if either had to die, he devoutly hoped it would not be himself, he stuck a pistol in his pocket and walked out the next morning with very much the same feeling he supposed he should have if he had been going to battle. He was ashamed to find himself much relieved when some one he met volunteered the information that Bluffy had left town by light that morning.

"Couldn't stand the racket. Terpy wouldn't even speak to him. But he'll come back. Jest as well tote your gun a little while, till somebody else kills him for you."

A few mornings later, as Keith was going down the street, he met again the "only decent-lookin' gal in Gumbolt." It was too late for him to turn off, for when he first caught sight of her he saw that she had seen him, and her head went up, and she turned her eyes away. He hoped to pass without appearing to know her; but just before they met, she cut her eye at him, and though his gaze was straight ahead, she said, "Good morning," and he touched his hat as he passed.

That afternoon he met her again. He was passing on as before, without looking at her, but she stopped him.

"Good afternoon." She spoke rather timidly, and the color that mounted to her face made her very handsome.

He returned the salutation coldly, and with an uneasy feeling that he was about to be made the object of another outpouring of her wrath. Her intention, however, was quite different.

"I don't want you to think I set that man on

you; it was somebody else done it.'' The color came and went in her cheeks.

Keith bowed politely, but preserved silence.

''I was mad enough to do it, but I didn't, and them that says I done it lies.'' She flushed, but looked him straight in the face.

''Oh, that's all right,'' said Keith, civilly, starting to move on.

''I wish they would let me and my affairs alone,'' she began. ''They're always a-talkin' about me, and I never done 'em no harm. First thing they know, I'll give 'em something to talk about.''

The suppressed fire was beginning to blaze again, and Keith looked somewhat anxiously down the street, wishing he were anywhere except in that particular company. To relieve the tension, he said:

''I did not mean to be rude to you the other day. Good morning.''

At the kind tone her face changed.

''I knew it. I was riled that mornin' about another thing—somethin' what happened the day before, about Bill,'' she explained. ''Bill's bad enough when he's in liquor, and I'd have sent him off for good long ago if they had let him alone. But they're always a-peckin' and

a-diggin' at him. They set him on drinkin' and fightin', and not one of 'em is man enough to stand up to him."

She gave a little whimper, and then, as if not trusting herself further, walked hastily away. Mr. Gilsey said to Gordon soon afterwards:

"Well, you've got one friend in Gumbolt as is a team by herself; you've captured Terp. She says you're the only man in Gumbolt as treats her like a lady."

Keith was both pleased and relieved.

A week or two after Keith had taken up his abode in Gumbolt, Mr. Gilsey was taken down with his old enemy, the rheumatism, and Keith went to visit him. He found him in great anxiety lest his removal from the box should hasten the arrival of the railway. He unexpectedly gave Keith evidence of the highest confidence he could have in any man. He asked if he would take the stage until he got well. Gordon readily assented.

So the next morning at daylight Keith found himself sitting in the boot, enveloped in old Tim's greatcoat, enthroned in that high seat toward which he had looked in his childhood-dreams.

It was hard work and more or less perilous

work, but his experience as a boy on the plantation and at Squire Rawson's, when he had driven the four-horse wagon, stood him in good stead.

Old Tim's illness was more protracted than any one had contemplated, and, before the first winter was out, Gordon had a reputation as a stage-driver second only to old Gilsey himself.

Stage-driving, however, was not his only occupation, and before the next Spring had passed, Keith had become what Mr. Plume called "one of Gumbolt's rising young sons." His readiness to lend a hand to any one who needed a helper began to tell. Whether it was Mr. Gilsey trying to climb with his stiff joints to the boot of his stage, or Squire Rawson's cousin, Captain Turley, the sandy-whiskered, sandy-clothed surveyor, running his lines through the laurel bushes among the gray débris of the crumbled mountain-side; Mr. Quincy Plume trying to evolve new copy from a splitting head, or the shouting wagon-drivers thrashing their teams up the muddy street, he could and would help any one.

He was so popular that he was nominated to be the town constable, a tribute to his victory over Mr. Bluffy.

Terpy and he, too, had become friends, and though Keith stuck to his resolution not to visit her "establishment," few days went by that she did not pass him on the street or happen along where he was, and always with a half-abashed nod and a rising color.

CHAPTER XII

KEITH DECLINES AN OFFER

WITH the growth of Gumbolt, Mr. Wickersham and his friends awakened to the fact that Squire Rawson was not the simple cattle-dealer he appeared to be, but was a man to be reckoned with. He not only held a large amount of the most valuable property in the Gap, but had as yet proved wholly intractable about disposing of it. Accordingly, the agent of Wickersham & Company, Mr. Halbrook, came down to Gumbolt to look into the matter. He brought with him a stout, middle-aged Scotchman, named Matheson, with keen eyes and a red face, who was represented to be the man whom Wickersham & Company intended to make the superintendent of their mines as soon as they should be opened.

The railroad not having yet been completed more than a third of the way beyond Eden, Mr. Halbrook took the stage to Gumbolt.

Owing to something that Mr. Gilsey had let fall about Keith, Mr. Halbrook sent next day for Keith. He wanted him to do a small piece of surveying for him. With him was the stout Scotchman, Matheson.

The papers and plats were on a table in his room, and Keith was looking at them.

"How long would it take you to do it?" asked Mr. Halbrook. He was a short, alert-looking man, with black eyes and a decisive manner. He always appeared to be in a hurry.

Keith was so absorbed that he did not answer immediately, and the agent repeated the question with a little asperity in his tone.

"I say how long would it take you to run those lines?"

"I don't know," said Keith, doubtfully. "I see a part of the property lies on the mountain-side just above and next to Squire Rawson's lands. I could let you know to-morrow."

"To-morrow! You people down here always want to put things off. That is the reason you are so behind the rest of the world. The stage-driver, however, told me that you were different, and that is the reason I sent for you."

Keith straightened himself. "Dr. Chalmers said when some one praised him as better than

other Scotchmen, 'I thank you, sir, for no compliment paid me at the expense of my countrymen.'" He half addressed himself to the Scotchman.

Matheson turned and looked him over, and as he did so his grim face softened a little.

"I know nothing about your doctors," said Mr. Halbrook; "what I want is to get this work done. Why can't you let me know to-day what it will cost? I have other things to do. I wish to leave to-morrow afternoon."

"Well," said Keith, with a little flush in his face, "I could guess at it to-day. I think it will take a very short time. I am familiar with a part of this property already, and—"

Mr. Halbrook was a man of quick intellect; moreover, he had many things on his mind just then. Among them he had to go and see what sort of a trade he could make with this Squire Rawson, who had somehow stumbled into the best piece of land in the Gap, and was now holding it in an obstinate and unreasonable way.

"Well, I don't want any guessing. I'll tell you what I will do. I will pay you so much for the job." He named a sum which was enough to make Keith open his eyes. It was more than he had ever received for any one piece of work.

"It would be cheaper for you to pay me by the day," Keith began.

"Not much! I know the way you folks work down here. I have seen something of it. No day-work for me. I will pay you so many dollars for the job. What do you say? You can take it or leave it alone. If you do it well, I may have some more work for you." He had no intention of being offensive; he was only talking what he would have called "business"; but his tone was such that Keith answered him with a flash in his eye, his breath coming a little more quickly.

"Very well; I will take it."

Keith took the papers and went out. Within a few minutes he had found his notes of the former survey and secured his assistants. His next step was to go to Captain Turley and take him into partnership in the work, and within an hour he was out on the hills, verifying former lines and running such new lines as were necessary. Spurred on by the words of the newcomer even more than by the fee promised him, Keith worked with might and main, and sat up all night finishing the work. Next day he walked into the room where Mr. Halbrook sat, in the company's big new office at the head of

the street. He had a roll of paper under his arm.

"Good morning, sir." His head was held rather high, and his voice had a new tone in it.

Mr. Wickersham's agent looked up, and his face clouded. He was not used to being addressed in so independent a tone.

"Good morning. I suppose you have come to tell me how long it will take you to finish the job that I gave you, or that the price I named is not high enough?"

"No," said Keith, "I have not. I have come to show you that my people down here do not always put things off till to-morrow. I have come to tell you that I have done the work. Here is your survey." He unrolled and spread out before Mr. Halbrook's astonished gaze the plat he had made. It was well done, the production of a draughtsman who knew the value of neatness and skill. The agent's eyes opened wide.

"Impossible! You could not have done it, or else you—"

"I have done it," said Keith, firmly. "It is correct."

"You had the plat before?" Mr. Halbrook's eyes were fastened on him keenly. He was

feeling a little sore at what he considered having been outwitted by this youngster.

"I had run certain of the lines before," said Keith: "these, as I started to tell you yesterday. And now," he said, with a sudden change of manner, "I will make you the same proposal I made yesterday. You can pay me what you think the work is worth. I will not hold you to your bargain of yesterday."

The other sat back in his chair, and looked at him with a different expression on his face.

"You must have worked all night?" he said thoughtfully.

"I did," said Keith, "and so did my assistant, but that is nothing. I have often done that for less money. Many people sit up all night in Gumbolt," he added, with a smile.

"That old stage-driver said you were a worker." Mr. Halbrook's eyes were still on him. "Where are you from?"

"Born and bred in the South," said Keith.

"I owe you something of an apology for what I said yesterday. I shall have some more work for you, perhaps."

The agent, when he went back to the North, was as good as his word. He told his people

that there was one man in Gumbolt who would do their work promptly.

"And he's straight," he said. "He says he is from the South; but he is a new issue."

He further reported that old Rawson, the countryman who owned the land in the Gap, either owned or controlled the cream of the coal-beds there. "He either knows or has been well advised by somebody who knows the value of all the lands about there. And he has about blocked the game. I think it's that young Keith, and I advise you to get hold of Keith."

"Who is Keith? What Keith? What is his name?" asked Mr. Wickersham.

"Gordon Keith."

Mr. Wickersham's face brightened. "Oh, that is all right; we can get him. We might give him a place?"

Mr. Halbrook nodded.

Mr. Wickersham sat down and wrote a letter to Keith, saying that he wished to see him in New York on a matter of business which might possibly turn out to his advantage. He also wrote a letter to General Keith, suggesting that he might possibly be able to give his son employment, and intimating that it was on account of his high regard for the General.

That day Keith met Squire Rawson on the street. He was dusty and travel-stained.

"I was jest comin' to see you," he said.

They returned to the little room which Keith called his office, where the old fellow opened his saddle-bags and took out a package of papers.

"They all thought I was a fool," he chuckled as he laid out deed after deed. "While they was a-talkin' I was a-ridin'. They thought I was buyin' cattle, and I was, but for every cow I bought I got a calf in the shape of the mineral rights to a tract of land. I'd buy a cow and I'd offer a man half as much again as she was worth if he'd sell me the mineral rights at a fair price, and he'd do it. He never had no use for 'em, an' I didn't know as I should either; but that young engineer o' yourn talked so positive I thought I might as well git 'em inside my pasture-fence." He sat back and looked at Keith with quizzical complacency.

"Come a man to see me not long ago," he continued; "Mr. Halbrook—black-eyed man, with a face white and hard like a tombstone. I set up and talked to him nigh all night and filled him plumb full of old applejack. That man sized me up for a fool, an' I sized him up

for a blamed smart Yankee. But I don't know as he got much the better of me."

Keith doubted it too.

"I think it was in and about the most vallyble applejack that I ever owned," continued the old landowner, after a pause. "You know, I don't mind Yankees as much as I used to—some of 'em. Of course, thar was Dr. Balsam; he was a Yankee; but I always thought he was somethin' out of the general run, like a piebald horse. That young engineer o' yourn that come to my house several years ago, he give me a new idea about 'em—an' about some other things, too. He was a very pleasant fellow, an' he knowed a good deal, too. It occurred to me 't maybe you might git hold of him, an' we might make somethin' out of these lands on our own account. Where is he now?"

Keith explained that Mr. Rhodes was somewhere in Europe.

"Well, time enough. He'll come home sometime, an' them lands ain't liable to move away. Yes, I likes some Yankees now pretty well; but, Lord! I loves to git ahead of a Yankee! They're so kind o' patronizin' to you. Well," he said, rising, "I thought I'd come up and talk to you about it. Some day I'll git you to look into matters a leetle for me."

The next day Keith received Mr. Wickersham's letter requesting him to come to New York. Keith's heart gave a bound.

The image of Alice Yorke flashed into his mind, as it always did when any good fortune came to him. Many a night, with drooping eyes and flagging energies, he had sat up and worked with renewed strength because she sat on the other side of the hot lamp.

It is true that communication between them had been but rare. Mrs. Yorke had objected to any correspondence, and he now began to see, though dimly, that her objection was natural. But from time to time, on anniversaries, he had sent her a book, generally a book of poems with marked passages in it, and had received in reply a friendly note from the young lady, over which he had pondered, and which he had always treasured and filed away with tender care.

Keith took the stage that night for Eden on his way to New York. As they drove through the pass in the moonlight he felt as if he were soaring into a new life. He was already crossing the mountains beyond which lay the Italy of his dreams.

He stopped on his way to see his father. The old gentleman's face glowed with pleasure as

he looked at Gordon and found how he had developed. Life appeared to be reopening for him also in his son.

"I will give you a letter to an old friend of mine, John Templeton. He has a church in New York. But it is not one of the fashionable ones; for

> 'Unpractised he to fawn or seek for power
> By doctrines fashioned to the varying hour:
> Far other aims his heart had learned to prize,
> More skilled to raise the wretched than to rise.'

You will find him a safe adviser. You will call also and pay my respects to Mr. and Mrs. Wentworth."

On his way, owing to a break in the railroad, Keith had to change his train at a small town not far from New York. Among the passengers was an old lady, simply and quaintly dressed, who had taken the train somewhere near Philadelphia. She was travelling quite alone, and appeared to be much hampered by her bags and parcels. The sight of an old woman, like that of a little girl, always softened Keith's heart. Something always awoke in him that made him feel tender. When Keith first observed this old lady, the entire company

was streaming along the platform in that haste which always marks the transfer of passengers from one train to another. No one appeared to notice her, and under the weight of her bags and bundles she was gradually dropping to the rear of the crowd. As Keith, bag in hand, swung past her with the rest, he instinctively turned and offered his services to help carry her parcels. She panted her thanks, but declined briefly, declaring that she should do very well.

"You may be doing very well," Keith said pleasantly, "but you will do better if you will let me help you."

"No, thank you." This time more firmly than before. "I am quite used to helping myself, and am not old enough for that yet. I prefer to carry my own baggage," she added with emphasis.

"It is not the question of age, I hope, that gives me the privilege of helping a lady," said Keith. He was already trying to relieve her of her largest bag and one or two bundles.

A keen glance from a pair of very bright eyes was shot at him.

"Well, I will let you take that side of that bag and this bundle—no; that one. Now, don't run away from me."

"No; I will promise not," said Keith, laughing; and relieved of that much of her burden, the old lady stepped out more briskly than she had been doing. When they finally reached a car, the seats were nearly all filled. There was one, however, beside a young woman at the far end, and this Keith offered to the old lady, who, as he stowed her baggage close about her, made him count the pieces carefully. Finding the tale correct, she thanked him with more cordiality than she had shown before, and Keith withdrew to secure a seat for himself. As, however, the car was full, he stood up in the rear of the coach, waiting until some passengers might alight at a way-station. The first seat that became vacant was one immediately behind the old lady, who had now fallen into a cheerful conversation with the young woman beside her.

"What do you do when strangers offer to take your bags?" Keith heard her asking as he seated himself.

"Why, I don't know; they don't often ask. I never let them do it," said the young woman, firmly.

"A wise rule, too. I have heard that that is the way nowadays that they rob women travelling alone. I had a young man insist on taking

my bag back there; but I am very suspicious of these civil young men." She leaned over and counted her parcels again. Keith could not help laughing to himself. As she sat up she happened to glance around, and he caught her eye. He saw her clutch her companion and whisper to her, at which the latter glanced over her shoulder and gave him a look that was almost a stare. Then the two conferred together, while Keith chuckled with amusement. What they were saying, had Keith heard it, would have amused him still more than the other.

"There he is now, right behind us," whispered the old lady.

"Why, he doesn't look like a robber."

"They never do. I have heard they never do. They are the most dangerous kind. Of course, a robber who looked it would be arrested on sight."

"But he is very good-looking," insisted the younger woman, who had, in the meantime, taken a second glance at Keith, who pretended to be immersed in a book.

"Well, so much the worse. They are the very worst kind. Never trust a good-looking young stranger, my dear. They may be all right in romances, but never in life."

As her companion did not altogether appear to take this view, the old lady half turned presently, and taking a long look down the other side of the car, to disarm Keith of any suspicion that she might be looking at him, finally let her eyes rest on his face, quite accidentally, as it were. A moment later she was whispering to her companion.

"I am sure he is watching us. I am going to ask you to stick close beside me when we get to New York until I find a hackney-coach."

"Have you been to New York often?" asked the girl, smiling.

"I have been there twice in the last thirty years; but I spent several winters there when I was a young girl. I suppose it has changed a good deal in that time?"

The young lady also supposed that it had changed in that time, and wondered why Miss Brooke—the name the other had given—did not come to New York oftener.

"You see, it is such an undertaking to go now," said the old lady. "Everything goes with such a rush that it takes my breath away. Why, three trains a day each way pass near my home now. One of them actually rushes by in the most impetuous and disdainful way. When

I was young we used to go to the station at least an hour before the train was due, and had time to take out our knitting and compose our thoughts; but now one has to be at the station just as promptly as if one were going to church, and if you don't get on the train almost before it has stopped, the dreadful thing is gone before you know it. I must say, it is very destructive to one's nerves."

Her companion laughed.

"I don't know what you will think when you get to New York."

"Think! I don't expect to think at all. I shall just shut my eyes and trust to Providence."

"Your friends will meet you there, I suppose?"

"I wrote them two weeks ago that I should be there to-day, and then my cousin wrote me to let her know the train, and I replied, telling her what train I expected to take. I would never have come if I had imagined we were going to have this trouble."

The girl reassured her by telling her that even if her friends did not meet her, she would put her in the way of reaching them safely. And in a little while they drew into the station.

Keith's first impression of New York was dazzling to him. The rush, the hurry, stirred him and filled him with a sense of power. He felt that here was the theatre of action for him.

The offices of Wickersham & Company were in one of the large buildings down-town. The whole floor was filled with pens and railed-off places, beyond which lay the private offices of the firm. Mr. Wickersham was "engaged," and Keith had to wait for an hour or two before he could secure an interview with him. When at length he was admitted to Mr. Wickersham's inner office, he was received with some cordiality. His father was asked after, and a number of questions about Gumbolt were put to him. Then Mr. Wickersham came to the point. He had a high regard for his father, he said, and having heard that Gordon was living in Gumbolt, where they had some interests, it had occurred to him that he might possibly be able to give him a position. The salary would not be large at first, but if he showed himself capable it might lead to something better.

Keith was thrilled, and declared that what he most wanted was work and opportunity to show that he was able to work. Mr. Wickersham was sure of this, and informed him briefly

that it was outdoor work that they had for him—"the clearing up of titles and securing of such lands as we may wish to obtain," he added.

This was satisfactory to Keith, and he said so.

Mr. Wickersham's shrewd eyes had a gleam of content in them.

"Of course, our interest will be your first consideration?" he said.

"Yes, sir; I should try and make it so."

"For instance," proceeded Mr. Wickersham, "there are certain lands lying near our lands, not of any special value; but still you can readily understand that as we are running a railroad through the mountains, and are expending large sums of money, it is better that we should control lands through which our line will pass."

Keith saw this perfectly. "Do you know the names of any of the owners?" he inquired. "I am familiar with some of the lands about there."

Mr. Wickersham pondered. Keith was so ingenuous and eager that there could be no harm in coming to the point.

"Why, yes; there is a man named Rawson that has some lands or some sort of interest in lands

that adjoin ours. It might be well for us to control those properties."

Keith's countenance fell.

"It happens that I know something of those lands."

"Yes? Well, you might possibly take those properties along with others?"

"I could certainly convey any proposition you wish to make to Mr. Rawson, and should be glad to do so," began Keith.

"We should expect you to use your best efforts to secure these and all other lands that we wish," interrupted Mr. Wickersham, speaking with sudden sharpness. "When we employ a man we expect him to give us all his services, and not to be half in our employ and half in that of the man we are fighting."

The change in his manner and tone was so great and so unexpected that Keith was amazed. He had never been spoken to before quite in this way. He, however, repressed his feeling.

"I should certainly render you the best service I could," he said; "but you would not expect me to say anything to Squire Rawson that I did not believe? He has talked with me about these lands, and he knows their value just as well as you do."

Mr. Wickersham looked at him with a cold light in his eyes, which suddenly recalled Ferdy to Keith.

"I don't think that you and I will suit each other, young man," he said.

Keith's face flushed; he rose. "I don't think we should, Mr. Wickersham. Good morning." And turning, he walked out of the room with his head very high.

As he passed out he saw Ferdy. He was giving some directions to a clerk, and his tone was one that made Keith glad he was not under him.

"Haven't you any brains at all?" Keith heard him say.

"Yes, but I did not understand you."

"Then you are a fool," said the young man.

Just then Keith caught his eye and spoke to him. Ferdy only nodded "Hello!" and went on berating the clerk.

Keith walked about the streets for some time before he could soothe his ruffled feelings and regain his composure. How life had changed for him in the brief interval since he entered Mr. Wickersham's office! Then his heart beat high with hope; life was all brightness to him; Alice Yorke was already won. Now in this short space of time his hopes were all over-

thrown. Yet, his instinct told him that if he had to go through the interview again he would do just as he had done.

He felt that his chance of seeing Alice would not be so good early in the day as it would be later in the afternoon; so he determined to deliver first the letter which his father had given him to Dr. Templeton.

The old clergyman's church and rectory stood on an ancient street over toward the river, from which wealth and fashion had long fled. His parish, which had once taken in many of the well-to-do and some of the wealthy, now embraced within its confines a section which held only the poor. But, like an older and more noted divine, Dr. Templeton could say with truth that all the world was his parish; at least, all were his parishioners who were needy and desolate.

The rectory was an old-fashioned, substantial house, rusty with age, and worn by the stream of poverty that had flowed in and out for many years.

When Keith mounted the steps the door was opened by some one without waiting for him to ring the bell, and he found the passages and

front room fairly filled with a number of persons whose appearance bespoke extreme poverty.

The Doctor was "out attending a meeting, but would be back soon," said the elderly woman who opened the door. "Would the gentleman wait?"

Just then the door opened and some one entered hastily. Keith was standing with his back to the door; but he knew by the movement of those before him, and the lighting up of their faces, that it was the Doctor himself, even before the maid said: "Here he is now."

He turned to find an old man of medium size, in a clerical dress quite brown with age and weather, but whose linen was spotless. His brow under his snow-white hair was lofty and calm; his eyes were clear and kindly; his mouth expressed both firmness and gentleness; his whole face was benignancy itself.

His eye rested for a moment on Keith as the servant indicated him, and then swept about the room; and with little more than a nod to Keith he passed him by and entered the waiting-room. Keith, though a little miffed at being ignored by him, had time to observe him as he

talked to his other visitors in turn. He manifestly knew his business, and appeared to Keith, from the scraps of conversation he heard, to know theirs also. To some he gave encouragement; others he chided; but to all he gave sympathy, and as one after another went out their faces brightened.

When he was through with them he turned and approached Keith with his hands extended.

"You must pardon me for keeping you waiting so long; these poor people have nothing but their time, and I always try to teach them the value of it by not keeping them waiting."

"Certainly, sir," said Keith, warmed in the glow of his kindly heart. "I brought a letter of introduction to you from my father, General Keith."

The smile that this name brought forth made Keith the old man's friend for life.

"Oh! You are McDowell Keith's son. I am delighted to see you. Come back into my study and tell me all about your father."

When Keith left that study, quaint and old-fashioned as were it and its occupant, he felt as though he had been in a rarer atmosphere. He had not dreamed that such a man could be found in a great city. He seemed to have the

heart of a boy, and Keith felt as if he had known him all his life. He asked Gordon to return and dine with him; but Gordon had a vision of sitting beside Alice Yorke at dinner that evening and declined.

CHAPTER XIII

KEITH IN NEW YORK

KEITH and Norman Wentworth had, from time to time, kept up a correspondence, and from Dr. Templeton's Keith went to call on Norman and his mother.

Norman, unfortunately, was now absent in the West on business, but Keith saw his mother.

The Wentworth mansion was one of the largest and most dignified houses on the fine old square—a big, double mansion. The door, with its large, fan-shaped transom and side-windows, reminded Keith somewhat of the hall door at Elphinstone, so that he had quite a feeling of old association as he tapped with the eagle knocker. The hall was not larger than at Elphinstone, but was more solemn, and Keith had never seen such palatial drawing-rooms. They stretched back in a long vista. The heavy mahogany furniture was covered with the richest brocades; the hangings were of heavy crimson

damask. Even the walls were covered with rich crimson damask-satin. The floor was covered with rugs in the softest colors, into which, as Keith followed the solemn servant, his feet sank deep, giving him a strange feeling of luxuriousness. A number of fine pictures hung on the walls, and richly bound books lay on the shining tables amid pieces of rare bric-à-brac.

This was the impression received from the only glance he had time to give the room. The next moment a lady rose from behind a tea-table placed in a nook near a window at the far end of the spacious room. As Gordon turned toward her she came forward. She gave him a cordial hand-shake and gracious words of welcome that at once made Keith feel at home. Turning, she started to offer him a chair near her table; but Keith had instinctively gone behind her chair and was holding it for her.

"It is so long since I have had the chance," he said.

As she smiled up at him her face softened. It was a high-bred face, not always as gentle as it was now; but her smile was charming.

"You do not look like the little, wan boy I saw that morning in bed, so long ago. Do you remember?"

"I should say I did. I think I should have died that morning but for you. I have never forgotten it a moment since." The rising color in his cheeks took away the baldness of the speech.

She bowed with the most gracious smile, the color stealing up into her cheeks and making her look younger.

"I am not used to such compliments. Young men nowadays do not take the trouble to flatter old ladies."

Her face, though faded, still bore the unmistakable stamp of distinction. Calm, gray eyes and a strong mouth and chin recalled Norman's face. The daintiest of caps rested on her gray hair like a crown, and several little ringlets about her ears gave the charm of quaintness to the patrician face. Her voice was deep and musical. When she first spoke it was gracious rather than cordial; but after the inspective look she had given him it softened, and from this time Keith felt her warmth.

The easy, cordial, almost confidential manner in which she soon began to talk to him made Keith feel as if they had been friends always, and in a moment, in response to a question from her, he was giving quite frankly his im-

pression of the big city: of its brilliance, its movement, its rush, that keyed up the nerves like the sweep of a swift torrent.

"It almost takes my breath away," he said. "I feel as if I were on the brink of a torrent and had an irresistible desire to jump into it and swim against it."

She looked at the young man in silence for a moment, enjoying his sparkling eyes, and then her face grew grave.

"Yes, it is interesting to get the impression made on a fresh young mind. But so many are dashed to pieces, it appears to me of late to be a maelstrom that engulfs everything in its resistless and terrible sweep. Fortune, health, peace, reputation, all are caught and swept away; but the worst is its heartlessness—and its emptiness."

She sighed so deeply that the young man wondered what sorrow could touch her, intrenched and enthroned in that beautiful mansion, surrounded by all that wealth and taste and affection could give. Years afterwards, that picture of the old-time gentlewoman in her luxurious home came back to him.

Just then a cheery voice was heard calling outside:

"Cousin?—cousin?—Matildy Carroll, where are you?"

It was the voice of an old lady, and yet it had something in it familiar to Keith.

Mrs. Wentworth rose, smiling.

"Here I am in the drawing-room," she said, raising her voice the least bit. "It is my cousin, a dear old friend and schoolmate," she explained to Keith. "Here I am. Come in here." She advanced to the door, stretching out her hand to some one who was coming down the stair.

"Oh, dear, this great, grand house will be the death of me yet!" exclaimed the other lady, as she slowly descended.

"Why, it is not any bigger than yours," protested Mrs. Wentworth.

"It's twice as large, and, besides, I was born in that and learned all its ups and downs and passages and corners when I was a child, just as I learned the alphabet. But this house! It is as full of devious ways and pitfalls as the way in 'Pilgrim's Progress,' and I would never learn it any more than I could the multiplication table. Why, that second floor suite you have given me is just like six-times-nine. When you first put me in there I walked around to learn

my way, and, on my word, I thought I should never get back to my own room. I thought I should have to sleep in a bath-tub. I escaped from the bath-room only to land in the linen-closet. That was rather interesting. Then when I had calculated all your sheets and pillow-cases, I got out of that to what I recognized as my own room. No! it was the broom-closet—eight-times-seven! That was the only familiar thing I saw. I could have hugged those brooms. But, my dear, I never saw so many brooms in my life! No wonder you have to have all those servants. I suppose some of them are to sweep the other servants up. But you really must shut off those apartments and just give me one little room to myself, or, now that I have escaped from the labyrinth, I shall put on my bonnet and go straight home."

All this was delivered from the bottom step with a most amusing gravity.

"Well, now that you have escaped, come in here," said Mrs. Wentworth, laughing. "I want a friend of mine to know you—a young man—"

"A gentleman!"

"Yes; a young gentleman from—"

"My dear!" exclaimed the other lady. "I

am not fit to see a young gentleman—I haven't on my new cap. I really could not."

"Oh, yes, you can. Come in. I want you to know him, too. He is—m—m—m—"

This was too low for Keith to hear. The next second Mrs. Wentworth turned and reëntered the room, holding by the hand Keith's old lady of the train.

As she laid her eyes on Keith, she stopped with a little shriek, shut both eyes tight, and clutched Mrs. Wentworth's arm.

"My dear, it's my robber!"

"It's what?"

"My robber! He's the young man I told you of who was so suspiciously civil to me on the train. I can never look him in the face—never!" Saying which, she opened her bright eyes and walked straight up to Keith, holding out her hand. "Confess that you are a robber and save me."

Keith laughed and took her hand.

"I know you took me for one." He turned to Mrs. Wentworth and described her making him count her bundles.

"You will admit that gentlemen were much rarer on that train than ruffians or those who looked like ruffians?" insisted the old lady,

gayly. "I came through the car, and not one soul offered me a seat. You deserve all the abuse you got for being so hopelessly unfashionable as to offer any civility to a poor, lonely, ugly old woman."

"Abby, Mr. Keith does not yet know who you are. Mr. Keith, this is my cousin, Miss Brooke."

"Miss Abigail Brooke, spinster," dropping him a quaint little curtsy.

So this was little Lois's old aunt, Dr. Balsam's sweetheart—the girl who had made him a wanderer; and she was possibly the St. Abigail of whom Alice Yorke used to speak!

The old lady turned to Mrs. Wentworth.

"He is losing his manners; see how he is staring. What did I tell you? One week in New York is warranted to break any gentleman of good manners."

"Oh, not so bad as that," said Mrs. Wentworth. "Now you sit down there and get acquainted with each other."

So Keith sat down by Miss Brooke, and she was soon telling him of her niece, who, she said, was always talking of him and his father.

"Is she as pretty as she was as a child?" Keith asked.

"Yes—much too pretty; and she knows it, too," smiled the old lady. "I have to hold her in with a strong hand, I tell you. She has got her head full of boys already."

Other callers began to appear just then. It was Mrs. Wentworth's day, and to call on Mrs. Wentworth was in some sort the cachet of good society. Many, it was true, called there who were not in "society" at all,—serene and self-contained old residents, who held themselves above the newly-rich who were beginning to crowd "the avenues" and force their way with a golden wedge,—and many who lived in splendid houses on the avenue had never been admitted within that dignified portal. They now began to drop in, elegantly dressed women and handsomely appointed girls. Mrs. Wentworth received them all with that graciousness that was her native manner. Miss Brooke, having secured her "new cap," was seated at her side, her faded face tinged with rising color, her keen eyes taking in the scene with quite as much avidity as Gordon's. Gordon had fallen back quite to the edge of the group that encircled the hostess, and was watching with eager eyes in the hope that, among the visitors who came in in little parties of twos and threes, he might find

the face for which he had been looking. The name Wickersham presently fell on his ear.

"She is to marry Ferdy Wickersham," said a lady near him to another. They were looking at a handsome, statuesque girl, with a proud face, who had just entered the room with her mother, a tall lady in black with strong features and a refined voice, and who were making their way through the other guests toward the hostess. Mrs. Wentworth greeted them cordially, and signed to the elder lady to take a seat beside her.

"Oh, no; she is flying for higher game than that." They both put up their lorgnons and gave her a swift glance.

"You mean—?" She nodded over toward Mrs. Wentworth.

"Yes."

"Why, she would not allow him to. She has not a cent in the world. Her mother has spent every dollar her husband left her, trying to get her off."

"Yes; but she has spent it to good purpose. They are old friends. Mrs. Wentworth does not care for money. She has all she needs. She has never forgotten that her grandfather was a general in the Revolution, and Mrs. Cald-

well's grandfather was one also, I believe. She looks down on the upper end of Fifth Avenue—the Wickershams and such. Don't you know what Mrs. Wentworth's cousin said when she heard that the Wickershams had a coat-of-arms? She said, 'Her father must have made it.' "

Something about the placid voice and air of the lady, and the knowledge she displayed of the affairs of others, awoke old associations in Keith, and turning to take a good look at her, he recognized Mrs. Nailor, the inquiring lady with the feline manner and bell-like voice, who used to mouse around the verandah at Gates's during Alice Yorke's convalescence.

He went up to her and recalled himself. She apparently had some difficulty in remembering him, for at first she gave not the slightest evidence of recognition; but after the other lady had moved away she was more fortunate in placing him.

"You have known the Wentworths for some time?"

Keith did not know whether this was a statement or an inquiry. She had a way of giving a tone of interrogation to her statements. He explained that he and Norman Wentworth had been friends as boys.

"A dear fellow, Norman?" smiled Mrs. Nailor. "Quite one of our rising young men? He wanted, you know, to give up the most brilliant prospects to help his father, who had been failing for some time. Not failing financially?" she explained with the interrogation-point again. "Of course, I don't believe those rumors; I mean in health?"

Keith had so understood her.

"Yes, he has quite gone. Completely shattered?" She sighed deeply. "But Norman is said to be wonderfully clever, and has gone in with his father into the bank?" she pursued. "The girl over there is to marry him—if her mother can arrange it? That tall, stuck-up woman." She indicated Mrs. Caldwell, who was sitting near Mrs. Wentworth. "Do you think her handsome?"

Keith said he did. He thought she referred to the girl, who looked wonderfully handsome in a tailor-made gown under a big white hat.

"Romance is almost dying out?" she sighed. "It is so beautiful to find it? Yes?"

Keith agreed with her about its charm, but hoped it was not dying out. He thought of one romance he knew.

"You used to be very romantic? Yes?"

Keith could not help blushing.

"Have you seen the Yorkes lately?" she continued. Keith had explained that he had just arrived. "You know Alice is a great belle? And so pretty, only she knows it too well; but what pretty girl does not? The town is divided now as to whether she is going to marry Ferdy Wickersham or Mr. Lancaster of Lancaster & Company. He is one of our leading men, considerably older than herself, but immensely wealthy and of a distinguished family. Ferdy Wickersham was really in love with"—she lowered her voice—"that girl over there by Mrs. Wentworth; but she preferred Norman Wentworth; at least, her mother did, so Ferdy has gone back to Alice? You say you have not been to see her? No? You are going, of course? Mrs. Yorke was so fond of you?"

"Which is she going to—I mean, which do people say she prefers?" inquired Keith, his voice, in spite of himself, betraying his interest.

"Oh, Ferdy, of course. He is one of the eligibles, so good-looking, and immensely rich, too. They say he is really a great financier. Has his father's turn? You know he came from a shop?"

Keith admitted his undeniable good looks and knew of his wealth; but he was so confounded by the information he had received that he was in quite a state of confusion.

Just then a young clergyman crossed the room toward them. He was a stout young man, with reddish hair and a reddish face. His plump cheeks, no less than his well-filled waistcoat, showed that the Rev. Mr. Rimmon was no anchoret.

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Nailor, so glad to see you! How well you look! I haven't seen you since that charming evening at Mrs. Creamer's."

"Do you call that charming? What did you think of the dinner?" asked Mrs. Nailor, dryly.

He laughed, and, with a glance around, lowered his voice.

"Well, the champagne was execrable after the first round. Didn't you notice that? You didn't notice it? Oh, you are too amiable to admit it. I am sure you noticed it, for no one in town has such champagne as you."

He licked his lips with reminiscent satisfaction.

"No, I assure you, I am not flattering you. One of my cloth! How dare you charge me with

it!" he laughed. "I have said as much to Mrs. Yorke. You ask her if I haven't."

"How is your uncle's health?" inquired Mrs. Nailor.

The young man glanced at her, and the glance appeared to satisfy him.

"Robust isn't the word for it. He bids fair to rival the patriarchs in more than his piety."

Mrs. Nailor smiled. "You don't appear as happy as a dutiful nephew might."

"But he is so good—so pious. Why should I wish to withhold him from the joys for which he is so ripe?"

Mrs. Nailor laughed.

"You are a sinner," she declared.

"We are all miserable sinners," he replied. "Have you seen the Yorkes lately?"

"No; but I'll be bound you have."

"What do you think of the story about old Lancaster?"

"Oh, I think she'll marry him if mamma can arrange it."

" 'Children, obey your parents,' " quoted Mr. Rimmon, with a little smirk as he sidled away.

"He is one of our rising young clergyman, nephew of the noted Dr. Little," explained Mrs. Nailor. "You know of him, of course? A good

deal better man than his nephew." This under her breath. "He is his uncle's assistant and is waiting to step into his shoes. He wants to marry your friend, Alice Yorke. He is sure of his uncle's church if flattery can secure it."

Just then several ladies passed near them, and Mrs. Nailor, seeing an opportunity to impart further knowledge, with a slight nod moved off to scatter her information and inquiries, and Keith, having made his adieus to Mrs. Wentworth, withdrew. He was not in a happy frame of mind over what he had heard.

The next visit that Keith paid required more thought and preparation than that to the Wentworth house. He had thought of it, had dreamed of it, for years. He was seized with a sort of nervousness when he found himself actually on the avenue, in sight of the large brown-stone mansion which he knew must be the abode of Miss Alice Yorke.

He never forgot the least detail of his visit, from the shining brass rail of the outside steps and the pompous little hard-eyed servant in a striped waistcoat and brass buttons, who looked at him insolently as he went in, to the same servant as he bowed to him obsequiously as he came out. He never forgot Alice Yorke's

first appearance in the radiance of girlhood, or Mrs. Yorke's affable imperviousness, that baffled him utterly.

The footman who opened the door to Keith looked at him with keenness, but ended in confusion of mind. He stood, at first, in the middle of the doorway and gave him a glance of swift inspection. But when Keith asked if the ladies were in he suddenly grew more respectful. The visitor was not up to the mark in appointment, but there was that in his air and tone which Bower recognized. He would see. Would he be good enough to walk in?

When he returned after a few minutes, indifference had given place to servility.

Would Mr. Keats please be good enough to walk into the drawing-room? Thankee, sir. The ladies would be down in a few moments.

Keith did not know that this change in bearing was due to the pleasure expressed abovestairs by a certain young lady who had flatly refused to accept her mother's suggestion that they send word they were not at home.

Alice Yorke was not in a very contented frame of mind that day. For some time she had been trying to make up her mind on a subject of grave importance to her, and she had not

found it easy to do. Many questions confronted her. Curiously, Keith himself had played a part in the matter. Strangely enough, she was thinking of him at the very time his card was brought up. Mrs. Yorke, who had not on her glasses, handed the card to Alice. She gave a little scream at the coincidence.

"Mr. Keith! How strange!"

"What is that?" asked her mother, quickly. Her ears had caught the name.

"Why, it is Mr. Keith. I was just—." She stopped, for Mrs. Yorke's face spoke disappointment.

"I do not think we can see him," she began.

"Why, of course, I must see him, mamma. I would not miss seeing him for anything in the world. Go down, Bower, and say I will be down directly." The servant disappeared.

"Now, Alice," protested her mother, who had already exhausted several arguments, such as the inconvenience of the hour, the impoliteness of keeping the visitor waiting, as she would have to do to dress, and several other such excuses as will occur to mammas who have plans of their own for their daughters and unexpectedly receive the card of a young man who, by a bare possibility, may in ten minutes upset

the work of nearly two years—"Now, Alice, I think it very wrong in you to do anything to give that young man any idea that you are going to reopen that old affair."

Alice protested that she had no idea of doing anything like that. There was no "old affair." She did not wish to be rude when he had taken the trouble to call—that was all.

"Fudge!" exclaimed Mrs. Yorke. "Trouble to call! Of course, he will take the trouble to call. He would call a hundred times if he thought he could get—" she caught her daughter's eye and paused—"could get you. But you have no right to cause him unhappiness."

"Oh, I guess I couldn't cause him much unhappiness now. I fancy he is all over it now," said the girl, lightly. "They all get over it. It's a quick fever. It doesn't last, mamma. How many have there been?"

"You know better. Isn't he always sending you books and things? He is not like those others. What would Mr. Lancaster say?"

"Oh, Mr. Lancaster! He has no right to say anything," pouted the girl, her face clouding a little. "Mr. Lancaster will say anything I want him to say," she added as she caught sight of her mother's unhappy expression. "I

wish you would not always be holding him up to me. I like him, and he is awfully good to me—much better than I deserve; but I get awfully tired of him sometimes: he is so serious. Sometimes I feel like breaking loose and just doing things. I do!" She tossed her head and stamped her foot with impatience like a spoiled child.

"Well, there is Ferdy?—" began her mother.

The girl turned on her.

"I thought we had an understanding on that subject, mamma. If you ever say anything more about my marrying Ferdy, I *will* do things! I vow I will!"

"Why, I thought you professed to like Ferdy, and he is certainly in love with you."

"He certainly is not. He is in love with Lou Caldwell as much as he could be in love with any one but himself; but if you knew him as well as I do you would know he is not in love with any one but Ferdy."

Mrs. Yorke knew when to yield, and how to do it. Her face grew melancholy and her voice pathetic as she protested that all she wished was her daughter's happiness.

"Then please don't mention that to me again," said the girl.

The next second her daughter was leaning over her, soothing her and assuring her of her devotion.

"I want to invite him to dinner, mamma."

Mrs. Yorke actually gasped.

"Nonsense! Why, he would be utterly out of place. This is not Ridgely. I do not suppose he ever had on a dress-coat in his life!" Which was true, though Keith would not have cared a button about it.

"Well, we can invite him to lunch," said Alice, with a sigh.

But Mrs. Yorke was obdurate. She could not undertake to invite an unknown young man to her table. Thus, the want of a dress-suit limited Mrs. Yorke's hospitality and served a secondary and more important purpose for her.

"I wish papa were here; he would agree with me," sighed the girl.

When the controversy was settled Miss Alice slipped off to gild the lily. The care she took in the selection of a toilet, and the tender pats and delicate touches she gave as she turned before her cheval-glass, might have belied her declaration to her mother, a little while before, that she was indifferent to Mr. Keith, and might even have given some comfort to the anxious

young man in the drawing-room below, who, in default of books, was examining the pictures with such interest. He had never seen such a sumptuous house.

Meantime, Mrs. Yorke executed a manœuvre. As soon as Alice disappeared, she descended to the drawing-room. But she slipped on an extra diamond ring or two. Thus she had a full quarter of an hour's start of her daughter.

The greeting between her and the young man was more cordial than might have been expected. Mrs. Yorke was surprised to find how Keith had developed. He had broadened, and though his face was thin, it had undeniable distinction. His manner was so dignified that Mrs. Yorke was almost embarrassed.

"Why, how you have changed!" she exclaimed.

What she said to herself was: "What a bother for this boy to come here now, just when Alice is getting her mind settled! But I will get rid of him."

She began to question him as to his plans.

What Keith had said to himself when the step on the stair and the rustling gown introduced Mrs. Yorke's portly figure was: "Heavens! it's

the old lady! I wonder what the old dragon will do, and whether I am not to see Her!" He observed her embarrassment as she entered the room, and took courage.

The next moment they were fencing across the room, and Keith was girding himself like another young St. George.

How was his school coming on? she asked.

He was not teaching any more. He had been to college, and had now taken up engineering. It offered such advantages.

She was so surprised. She would have thought teaching the very career for him. He seemed to have such a gift for it.

Keith was not sure that this was not a "touch." He quoted Dr. Johnson's definition that teaching was the universal refuge of educated indigents. "I do not mean to remain an indigent all my life," he added, feeling that this was a touch on his part.

Mrs. Yorke pondered a moment.

"But that was not his name. His name was Balsam. I know, because I had some trouble getting a bill out of him."

Keith changed his mind about the touch.

Just then there was another rustle on the stair and another step,—this time a lighter one,—

and the next moment appeared what was to the young man a vision.

Keith's face, as he rose to greet her, showed what he thought. For a moment, at least, the dragon had disappeared, and he stood in the presence only of Alice Yorke.

The girl was, indeed, as she paused for a moment just in the wide doorway under its silken hangings,—the minx! how was he to know that she knew how effective the position was?—a picture to fill a young man's eye and flood his face with light, and even to make an old man's eye grow young again. The time that had passed had added to the charm of both face and figure; and, arrayed in her daintiest toilet of blue and white, Alice Yorke was radiant enough to have smitten a much harder heart than that which was at the moment thumping in Keith's breast and looking forth from his eager eyes. The pause in the doorway gave just time for the picture to be impressed forever in Keith's mind.

Her eyes were sparkling, and her lips parted with a smile of pleased surprise.

"How do you do?" She came forward with outstretched arm and a cordial greeting.

Mrs. Yorke could not repress a mother's

pride at seeing the impression that her daughter's appearance had made. The expression on Keith's face, however, decided her that she would hazard no more such meetings.

The first words, of course, were of the surprise Alice felt at finding him there. "How did you remember us?"

"I was not likely to forget you," said Keith, frankly enough. "I am in New York on business, and I thought that before going home I would see my friends." This with some pride, as Mrs. Yorke was present.

"Where are you living?"

Keith explained that he was an engineer and lived in Gumbolt.

"Ah, I think that is a splendid profession," declared Miss Alice. "If I were a man I would be one. Think of building great bridges across mighty rivers, tunnelling great mountains!"

"Maybe even the sea itself," said Mr. Keith, who, so long as Alice's eyes were lighting up at the thought of his profession, cared not what Mrs. Yorke thought.

"I doubt if engineers would find much to do in New York," put in Mrs. Yorke. "I think the West would be a good field—the far West," she explained.

"It was so good in you to look us up," Miss Alice said sturdily and, perhaps, a little defiantly, for she knew what her mother was thinking.

"If that is being good," said Keith, "my salvation is assured." He wanted to say, as he looked at her, "In all the multitude in New York there is but one person that I really came to see, and I am repaid," but he did not venture so far. In place of it he made a mental calculation of the chances of Mrs. Yorke leaving, if only for a moment. A glance at her, however, satisfied him that the chance of it was not worth considering, and gloom began to settle on him. If there is anything that turns a young man's heart to lead and encases it in ice, it is, when he has travelled leagues to see a girl, to have mamma plant herself in the room and mount guard. Keith knew now that Mrs. Yorke had mounted guard, and that no power but Providence would dislodge her. The thought of the cool woods of the Ridge came to him like a mirage, torturing him.

He turned to the girl boldly.

"Sha'n't you ever come South again?" he asked. "The humming-birds are waiting."

Alice smiled, and her blush made her charming.

Mrs. Yorke answered for her. She did not think the South agreed with Alice.

Alice protested that she loved it.

"How is my dear old Doctor? Do you know, he and I have carried on quite a correspondence this year?"

Keith did not know. For the first time in his life he envied the Doctor.

"He is your—one of your most devoted admirers. The last time I saw him he was talking of you."

"What did he say of me? Do tell me!" with exaggerated eagerness.

Keith smiled, wondering what she would think if she knew.

"Too many things for me to tell."

His gray eyes said the rest.

While they were talking a sound of wheels was heard outside, followed by a ring at the door. Keith sat facing the door, and could see the gentleman who entered the hall. He was tall and a little gray, with a pleasant, self-contained face. He turned toward the drawing-room, taking off his gloves as he walked.

"Her father. He is quite distinguished-

looking," thought Keith. "I wonder if he will come in here? He looks younger than the dragon." He was in some trepidation at the idea of meeting Mr. Yorke.

When Keith looked at the ladies again some change had taken place in both of them. Their faces wore a different expression: Mrs. Yorke's was one of mingled disquietude and relief, and Miss Alice's an expression of discontent and confusion. Keith settled himself and waited to be presented.

The gentleman came in with a pleased air as his eye rested on the young lady.

"There is where she gets her high-bred looks —from her father," thought Keith, rising.

The next moment the gentleman was shaking hands warmly with Miss Alice and cordially with Mrs. Yorke. And then, after a pause,— a pause in which Miss Alice had looked at her mother,—the girl introduced "Mr. Lancaster." He turned and spoke to Keith pleasantly.

"Mr. Keith is—an acquaintance we made in the South when we were there winter before last," said Mrs. Yorke.

"A friend of ours," said the girl. She turned back to Keith.

"Tell me what Dr. Balsam said."

"Mr. Keith knows the Wentworths—I believe you know the Wentworths very well?" Mrs. Yorke addressed Mr. Keith.

"Yes; I have known Norman since we were boys. I have met his mother, but I never met his father."

Mrs. Yorke was provoked at the stupidity of denying so advantageous an acquaintance. But Mr. Lancaster took more notice of Keith than he had done before. His dark eyes had a gleam of amusement in them as he turned and looked at the young man. Something in him recalled the past.

"From the South, you say?"

"Yes, sir." He named his State with pride.

"Did I catch your name correctly? Is it Keith?"

"Yes, sir."

"I used to know a gentleman of that name—General Keith."

"There were several of them," answered the young man, with pride. "My father was known as 'General Keith of Elphinstone.'"

"That was he. I captured him. He was desperately wounded, and I had the pleasure of having him attended to, and afterwards of get-

ting him exchanged. How is he? Is he still living?''

''Yes, sir.''

Mr. Lancaster turned to the ladies. ''He was one of the bravest men I have known,'' he said. ''I was once a recipient of his gracious hospitality. I went South to look into some matters there,'' he explained to the ladies.

The speech brought a gratified look into Keith's eyes.

Mrs. Yorke was divided between her feeling of relief that Mr. Lancaster should know of Keith's social standing and her fear that such praise might affect Alice. After a glance at the girls's face the latter predominated.

''Men have no sense at all,'' she said to herself. Had she known it, the speech made the girl feel more kindly toward her older admirer than she had ever done before.

Gordon's face was suffused with tenderness, as it always was at any mention of his father. He stepped forward.

''May I shake hands with you, sir?'' He grasped the hand of the older man. ''If I can ever be of any service to you—of the least service—I hope you will let my father's son re-

pay a part of his debt. You could not do me a greater favor." As he stood straight and dignified, grasping the older man's hand, he looked more of a man than he had ever done. Mr. Lancaster was manifestly pleased.

"I will do so," he said, with a smile.

Mrs. Yorke was in a fidget. "This man will ruin everything," she said to herself.

Seeing that his chance of seeing Alice alone was gone, Keith rose and took leave with some stateliness. At the last moment Alice boldly asked him to take lunch with them next day.

"Thank you," said Keith, "I lunch in Sparta to-morrow. I am going South to-night." But his allusion was lost on the ladies.

When Keith came out, a handsome trap was standing at the door, with a fine pair of horses and a liveried groom.

And a little later, as Keith was walking up the avenue looking at the crowds that thronged it in all the bravery of fine apparel, he saw the same pair of high-steppers threading their way proudly among the other teams. He suddenly became aware that some one was bowing to him, and there was Alice Yorke sitting up beside Mr. Lancaster, bowing to him from under a big hat

with great white plumes. For one moment he had a warm feeling about his heart, and then, as the turnout was swallowed up in the crowd, Keith felt a sudden sense of loneliness, and he positively hated Mrs. Yorke. A little later he passed Ferdy Wickersham, in a long coat and a high hat, walking up the avenue with the girl he had seen at Mrs. Wentworth's. He took off his hat as they passed, but apparently they did not see him. And once more that overwhelming loneliness swept over him.

He did not get over the feeling till he found himself in Dr. Templeton's study. He had promised provisionally to go back and take supper with the old clergyman, and had only not promised it absolutely because he had thought he might be invited to the Yorkes'. He was glad enough now to go, and as he received the old gentleman's cordial greeting, he felt his heart grow warm again. Here was Sparta, too. This, at least, was hospitality. He was introduced to two young clergymen, both earnest fellows who were working among the poor. One of them was a High-churchman and the other a Presbyterian, and once or twice they began to discuss warmly questions as to which they

differed; but the old Rector appeared to know just how to manage them.

"Come, my boys; no division here," he said, with a smile, "Remember, one flag, one union, one Commander. Titus is still before the walls."

CHAPTER XIV

THE HOLD-UP

KEITH returned home that night. He now and then thought of Lancaster with a little misgiving. It was apparent that Mrs. Yorke was his friend; but, after all, Alice would never think of marrying a gray-haired man. She could not do it.

His father's pleasure when he told him of the stand he had taken with Mr. Wickersham reassured him.

"You did exactly right, sir; as a gentleman should have done," he said, as his face lighted up with pride and affection. "Go back and make your own way. Owe no man anything."

Gordon went back to his little office filled with a determination to succeed. He had now a double motive: he would win Alice Yorke, and he would show Mr. Wickersham who he was. A visit from Squire Rawson not long after he returned gave him new hope. The old man

chuckled as he told him that he had had an indirect offer from Wickersham for his land, much larger than he had expected. It had only confirmed him in his determination to hold on.

"If it's worth that to him," he said, "it's worth that to me. We'll hold on awhile, and let him open a track for us. You look up the lines and keep your eye on 'em. Draw me some pictures of the lands. I reckon Phrony will have a pretty good patrimony before I'm through." He gave Keith a shrewd glance which, however, that young man did not see.

Not long afterwards Gordon received an invitation to Norman's wedding. He was to marry Miss Caldwell.

When Gordon read the account of the wedding, with the church "banked with flowers," and the bridal couple preceded by choristers, chanting, he was as interested as if it had been his brother's marriage. He tried to picture Alice Yorke in her bridesmaid's dress, "with the old lace draped over it and the rosebuds festooned about her."

He glanced around his little room with grim amusement as he thought of the difference it might make to him if he had what Mrs. Yorke

had called "an establishment." He would yet be Keith of Elphinstone.

One fact related disturbed him. Ferdy Wickersham was one of the ushers, and it was stated that he and Miss Yorke made a handsome couple.

Norman had long ago forgotten Ferdy's unfriendly action at college, and wishing to bury all animosities and start his new life at peace with the whole world, he invited Ferdy to be one of his ushers, and Ferdy, for his own reasons, accepted. Ferdy Wickersham was now one of the most talked-of young men in New York. He had fulfilled the promise of his youth at least in one way, for he was one of the handsomest men in the State. Mrs. Wickersham, in whose heart defeat rankled, vowed that she would never bow so low as to be an usher at that wedding. But her son was of a deeper nature. He declared that he was "abundantly able to manage his own affairs."

At the wedding he was one of the gayest of the guests, and he and Miss Yorke were, as the newspapers stated, undoubtedly the handsomest couple of all the attendants. No one congratulated Mrs. Wentworth with more fervid words. To be sure, his eyes sought the

bride's with a curious expression in them; and when he spoke with her apart a little later, there was an air of cynicism about him that remained in her memory. The handsomest jewel she received outside of the Wentworth family was from him. Its centre was a heart set with diamonds.

For a time Louise Wentworth was in the seventh heaven of ecstasy over her good fortune. Her beautiful house, her carriages, her gowns, her husband, and all the equipage of her new station filled her heart. She almost immediately took a position that none other of the young brides had. She became the fashion. In Norman's devotion she might have quite forgotten Ferdy Wickersham, had Ferdy been willing that she should do so. But Ferdy had no idea of allowing himself to be forgotten. For a time he paid quite devoted attention to Alice Yorke; but Miss Alice looked on his attentions rather as a joke. She said to him:

"Now, Ferdy, I am perfectly willing to have you send me all the flowers in New York, and go with me to the theatre every other night, and offer me all the flattery you have left over from Louise; but I am not going to let it be thought

that I am going to engage myself to you; for I am not, and you don't want me."

"I suppose you reserve that for my fortunate rival, Mr. Lancaster?" said the young man, insolently.

Alice's eyes flashed. "At least not for you."

So Ferdy gradually and insensibly drifted back to Mrs. Wentworth. For a little while he was almost tragic; then he settled down into a state of cold cynicism which was not without its effect. He never believed that she cared for Norman Wentworth as much as she cared for him. He believed that her mother had made the match, and deep in his heart he hated Norman with the hate of wounded pride. Moreover, as soon as Mrs. Wentworth was beyond him, he began to have a deeper feeling for her than he had ever admitted before. He set before himself very definitely just what he wanted to do, and he went to work about it with a patience worthy of a better aim. He flattered her in many ways which, experience had told him, were effective with the feminine heart.

Ferdy Wickersham estimated Mrs. Wentworth's vanity at its true value; but he underestimated her uprightness and her pride. She was vain enough to hazard wrecking her

happiness; but her pride was as great as her vanity.

Thus, though Ferdy Wickersham flattered her vanity by his delicate attentions, his patient waiting, he found himself, after long service, in danger of being balked by her pride. His apparent faithfulness had enlisted her interest; but she held him at a distance with a resolution which he would not have given her credit for.

Most men, under such circumstances, would have retired and confessed defeat; but not so with Ferdy Wickersham. To admit defeat was gall and wormwood to him. His love for Louise had given place to a feeling almost akin to a desire for revenge. He would show her that he could conquer her pride. He would show the world that he could humble Norman Wentworth. His position appeared to him impregnable. At the head of a great business, the leader of the gayest set in the city, and the handsomest and coolest man in town—he was bound to win. So he bided his time, and went on paying Mrs. Wentworth little attentions that he felt must win her in the end. And soon he fancied that he began to see the results of his patience. Old Mr. Wentworth's health had failed rapidly, and Norman was so wholly engrossed in business,

that he found himself unable to keep up with the social life of their set. If, however, Norman was too busy to attend all the entertainments, Ferdy was never too busy to be on hand, a fact many persons were beginning to note.

Squire Rawson's refusal of the offer for his lands began to cause Mr. Aaron Wickersham some uneasiness. He had never dreamed that the old countryman would be so intractable. He refused even to set a price on them. He "did not want to sell," he said.

Mr. Wickersham conferred with his son. "We have got to get control of those lands, Ferdy. We ought to have got them before we started the railway. If we wait till we get through, we shall have to pay double. The best thing is for you to go down there and get them. You know the chief owner and you know that young Keith. You ought to be able to work them. We shall have to employ Keith if necessary. Sometimes a very small lever will work a big one."

"Oh, I can work them easy enough," said the young man; "but I don't want to go down there just now—the weather's cold, and I have a lot of engagements and a matter on hand that requires my presence here now."

His father's brow clouded. Matters had not

been going well of late. The Wentworths had been growing cooler both in business and in social life. In the former it had cost him a good deal of money to have the Wentworth interest against him; in the latter it had cost Mrs. Wickersham a good deal of heart-burning. And Aaron Wickersham attributed it to the fact, of which rumors had come to him, that Ferdy was paying young Mrs. Wentworth more attention than her husband and his family liked, and they took this form of resenting it.

"I do not know what business engagement you can have more important than a matter in which we have invested some millions which may be saved by prompt attention or lost. What engagements have you?"

"That is my affair," said Ferdy, coolly.

"Your affair! Isn't your affair my affair?" burst out his father.

"Not necessarily. There are several kinds of affairs. I should be sorry to think that all of my affairs you had an interest in."

He looked so insolent as he sat back with half-closed eyes and stroked his silken, black moustache that his father lost his temper.

"I know nothing about your affairs of one kind," he burst out angrily, "and I do not wish

to know; but I want to tell you that I think you are making an ass of yourself to be hanging around that Wentworth woman, having every one talking about you and laughing at you."

The young man's dark face flushed angrily.

"What's that?" he said sharply.

"She is another man's wife. Why don't you let her alone?" pursued the father.

"For that very reason," said Ferdy, recovering his composure and his insolent air.

"—— it! Let the woman alone," said his father. "Your fooling around her has already cost us the backing of Wentworth & Son—and, incidentally, two or three hundred thousand."

The younger man looked at the other with a flash of rage. This quickly gave way to a colder gleam.

"Really, sir, I could not lower myself to measure a matter of sentiment by so vulgar a standard as your —— money."

His air was so intolerable that the father's patience quite gave way.

"Well, by ——! you'd better lower yourself, or you'll have to stoop lower than that. Creamer, Crustback & Company are out with us; the Wentworths have pulled out; so have Kestrel and others. Your deals and corners

have cost me a fortune. I tell you that unless we pull through that deal down yonder, and unless we get that railroad to earning something, so as to get a basis for rebounding, you'll find yourself wishing you had my 'damned money.'"

"Oh, I guess we'll pull it through," said the young man. He rose coolly and walked out of the office.

The afternoon he spent with Mrs. Norman. He had to go South, he told her, to look after some large interests they had there. He made the prospects so dazzling that she laughingly suggested that he had better put a little of her money in there for her. She had quite a snug sum that the Wentworths had given her.

"Why do not you ask Norman to invest it?" he inquired, with a laugh.

"Oh, I don't know. He says bonds are the proper investment for women."

"He rather underestimates your sex, some of them," said Wickersham. And as he watched the color come in her cheeks, he added: "I tell you what I will do: I will put in fifty thousand for you on condition that you never mention it to a soul."

"I promise," she said half gratefully, and they shook hands on it.

That evening he informed his father that he would go South. "I'll get those lands easy enough," he said.

A few days later Ferdy Wickersham got off the train at Ridgely, now quite a flourishing little health-resort, and in danger of becoming a fashionable one, and that afternoon he drove over to Squire Rawson's.

A number of changes had taken place in the old white-pillared house since Ferdy had been an inmate. New furniture of black walnut supplanted, at least on the first floor, the old horsehair sofa and split-bottomed chairs and pine tables; a new plush sofa and a new piano glistened in the parlor; large mirrors with dazzling frames hung on the low walls, and a Brussels carpet as shiny as a bed of tulips, and as stiff as the stubble of a newly cut hay-field, was on the floor.

But great as were these changes, they were not as great as that which had taken place in the young person for whom they had been made.

When Ferdy Wickersham drove up to the door, there was a cry and a scurry within, as Phrony Tripper, after a glance out toward the gate, dashed up the stairs.

When Miss Euphronia Tripper, after a half-

hour or more of careful and palpitating work before her mirror, descended the old straight stairway, she was a very different person from the round-faced, plump school-girl whom Ferdy, as a lad, had flirted with under the apple-trees three or four years before. She was quite as different as was the new piano with its deep tones from the rattling old instrument that jingled and clanged out of tune, or as the cool, self-contained, handsome young man in faultless attire was from the slim, uppish boy who used to strum on it. It was a very pretty and blushing young country maiden who now entered quite accidentally the parlor where sat Mr. Ferdy Wickersham in calm and indifferent discourse with her grandfather on the crops, on cattle, and on the effect of the new railroad on products and prices.

Several sessions at a boarding-school of some pretension, with ambition which had been awakened years before under the apple-trees, had given Miss Phrony the full number of accomplishments that are to be gained by such means. The years had also changed the round, school-girl plumpness into a slim yet strong figure; and as she entered the parlor,—quite casually, be it repeated,—with a large basket of flowers

held carelessly in one hand and a great hat shading her face, the blushes that sprang to her cheeks at the wholly unexpected discovery of a visitor quite astonished Wickersham.

"By Jove! who would have believed it!" he said to himself.

Within two minutes after she had taken her seat on the sofa near Wickersham, that young envoy had conceived a plan which had vaguely suggested itself as a possibility during his journey South. Here was an ally to his hand; he could not doubt it; and if he failed to win he would deserve to lose.

The old squire had no sooner left the room than the visitor laid the first lines for his attack.

Why was she surprised to see him? He had large interests in the mountains, and could she doubt that if he was within a thousand miles he would come by to see her?

The mantling cheeks and dancing eyes showed that this took effect.

"Oh, you came down on business? That was all! I know," she said.

Wickersham looked her in the eyes.

Business was only a convenient excuse. Old Halbrook could have attended to the business; but he preferred to come himself. Possibly

she could guess the reason? He looked handsome and sincere enough as he leant over and gazed in her face to have beguiled a wiser person than Phrony.

She, of course, had not the least idea.

Then he must tell her. To do this he found it necessary to sit on the sofa close to her. What he told her made her blush very rosy again, and stammer a little as she declared her disbelief in all he said, and was sure there were the prettiest girls in the world in New York, and that he had never thought of her a moment. And no, she would not listen to him—she did not believe a word he said; and—yes, of course, she was glad to see any old friend; and no, he should not go. He must stay with them. They expected him to do so.

So Ferdy sent to Ridgely for his bags, and spent several days at Squire Rawson's, and put in the best work he was capable of during that time. He even had the satisfaction of seeing Phrony treat coldly and send away one or two country bumpkins who rode up in all the bravery of long broad-cloth coats and kid gloves.

But if at the end of this time the young man could congratulate himself on success in one quarter, he knew that he was balked in the other.

Phrony Tripper was heels over head in love with him; but her grandfather, though easy and pliable enough to all outward seeming, was in a land-deal as dull as a ditcher. Wickersham spread out before him maps and plats showing that he owned surveys which overlapped those under which the old man claimed.

"Don't you see my patents are older than yours?"

"Looks so," said the old man, calmly. "But patents is somethin' like folks: they may be too old."

The young man tried another line.

The land was of no special value, he told him; he only wanted to quiet their titles, etc. But the squire not only refused to sell an acre at the prices offered him, he would place no other price whatever on it.

In fact, he did not want to sell. He had bought the land for mountain pasture, and he didn't know about these railroads and mines and such like. Phrony would have it after his death, and she could do what she wished with it after he was dead and gone.

"He is a fool!" thought Wickersham, and set Phrony to work on him; but the old fellow was obdurate. He kissed Phrony for her wheed-

ling, but told her that women-folks didn't understand about business. So Wickersham had to leave without getting the lands.

The influx of strangers was so great now at Gumbolt that there was a stream of vehicles running between a point some miles beyond Eden, which the railroad had reached, and Gumbolt. Wagons, ambulances, and other vehicles of a nondescript character on good days crowded the road, filling the mountain pass with the cries and oaths of their drivers and the rumbling and rattling of their wheels, and filling Mr. Gilsey's soul with disgust. But the vehicle of honor was still "Gilsey's stage." It carried the mail and some of the express, had the best team in the mountains, and was known as the "reg'-lar." On bad nights the road was a little less crowded. And it was a bad night that Ferdy Wickersham took for his journey to Gumbolt.

Keith had been elected marshal, but had appointed Dave Dennison his deputy, and on inclement nights Keith still occasionally relieved Tim Gilsey, for in such weather the old man was sometimes too stiff to climb up to his box.

"The way to know people," said the old

driver to him, "is to travel on the road with 'em. There is many a man decent enough to pass for a church deacon; git him on the road, and you see he is a hog, and not of no improved breed at that. He wants to gobble everything": an observation that Keith had some opportunity to verify.

Terpsichore appeared suddenly to have a good deal of business over in Eden, and had been on the stage several times of late when Keith was driving it, and almost always took the box-seat. This had occurred often enough for some of his acquaintances in Gumbolt to rally him about it.

"You will have to look out for Mr. Bluffy again," they said. "He's run J. Quincy off the track, and he's still in the ring. He's layin' low; but that's the time to watch a mountain cat. He's on your track."

Mr. Plume, who was always very friendly with Keith, declared that it was not Bluffy, but Keith, who had run him off the track. "It's a case where virtue has had its reward," he said to Keith. "You have overthrown more than your enemy, Orlando. You have captured the prize we were all trying for. Take the goods the gods provide, and while you live, live. The

epicurean is the only true philosopher. Come over and have a cocktail? No? Do you happen to have a dollar about your old clothes? I have not forgotten that I owe you a little account; but you are the only man of soul in this —— Gehenna except myself, and I'd rather owe you ten dollars than any other man living."

Keith's manner more than his words shut up most of his teasers. Nothing would shut up J. Quincy Plume.

Keith always treated Terpsichore with all the politeness he would have shown to any lady. He knew that she was now his friend, and he had conceived a sincere liking for her. She was shy and very quiet when a passenger on his stage, ready to do anything he asked, obedient to any suggestion he gave her.

It happened that, the night Wickersham chose for his trip to Gumbolt, Keith had relieved old Gilsey, and he found her at the Eden end of the route among his passengers. She had just arrived from Gumbolt by another vehicle and was now going straight back. As Keith came around, the young woman was evidently preparing to take the box-seat. He was conscious of a feeling of embarrassment, which was not diminished by the fact that Jake Dennison, his

old pupil, was also going over. Jake as well as Dave was now living at Gumbolt. Jake was in all the splendor of a black coat and a gilded watch-chain, for he had been down to the Ridge to see Miss Euphronia Tripper.

It had been a misty day, and toward evening the mist had changed into a drizzle.

Keith said to Terpsichore, with some annoyance:

"You had better go inside. It's going to be a bad night."

A slight change came over her face, and she hesitated. But when he insisted, she said quietly, "Very well."

As the passengers were about to take their seats in the coach, a young man enveloped in a heavy ulster came hurriedly out of the hotel, followed by a servant with several bags in his hands, and pushed hastily into the group, who were preparing to enter the coach in a more leisurely fashion. His hat partly concealed his face, but something about him called up memories to Keith that were not wholly pleasant. When he reached the coach door Jake Dennison and another man were just on the point of helping in one of the women. The young man squeezed in between them.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

The two men stood aside at the polite tone, and the other stepped into the stage and took the back seat, where he proceeded to make himself comfortable in a corner. This, perhaps, might have passed but for the presence of the women. Woman at this mountain Eden was at a premium, as she was in the first.

Jake Dennison and his friend both asserted promptly that there was no trouble about three of the ladies getting back seats, and Jake, putting his head in at the door, said briefly:

"Young man, there are several ladies out here. You will have to give up that seat."

As there was no response to this, he put his head in again.

"Didn't you hear? I say there are some ladies out here. You will have to take another seat."

To this the occupant of the stage replied that he had paid for his seat; but there were plenty of other seats that they could have. This was repeated on the outside, and thereupon one of the women said she supposed they would have to take one of the other seats.

Women do not know the power of surrender.

This surrender had no sooner been made than every man outside was her champion.

"You will ride on that back seat to Gumbolt to-night, or I'll ride in Jim Digger's hearse. I am layin' for him anyhow." The voice was Jake Dennison's.

"And I'll ride with him. Stand aside, Jake, and let me git in there. I'll yank him out," said his friend.

But Jake was not prepared to yield to any one the honor of "yanking." Jake had just been down to Squire Rawson's, and this young man was none other than Mr. Ferdy Wickersham. He had been there, too.

Jake had left with vengeance in his heart, and this was his opportunity. He was just entering the stage head foremost, when the occupant of the coveted seat decided that discretion was the better part of valor, and announced that he would give up the seat, thereby saving Keith the necessity of intervening, which he was about to do.

The ejected tenant was so disgruntled that he got out of the stage, and, without taking any further notice of the occupants, called up to know if there was a seat outside.

"Yes. Let me give you a hand," said Gor-

don, leaning down and helping him up. "How are you?"

Wickersham looked at him quickly as he reached the boot.

"Hello! You here?" The rest of his sentence was a malediction on the barbarians in the coach below and a general consignment of them all to a much warmer place than the boot of the Gumbolt stage.

"What are you doing here?" Wickersham asked.

"I am driving the stage."

"Regularly?" There was something in the tone and look that made Keith wish to say no, but he said doggedly:

"I have done it regularly, and was glad to get the opportunity."

He was conscious of a certain change in Wickersham's manner toward him.

As they drove along he asked Wickersham about Norman and his people, but the other answered rather curtly.

Norman had married.

"Yes." Keith had heard that. "He married Miss Caldwell, didn't he? She was a very pretty girl."

"What do you know about her?" Wickersham asked. His tone struck Keith.

"Oh, I met her once. I suppose they are very much in love with each other?"

Wickersham gave a short laugh. "In love with Norman! Women don't fall in love with a lump of ice."

"I do not think he is a lump of ice," said Keith, firmly.

Wickersham did not answer at first, then he said sharply:

"Well, she's worth a thousand of him. She married him for his money. Certainly not for his brains."

"Norman has brains—as much as any one I know," defended Keith.

"You think so!"

Keith remembered a certain five minutes out behind the stables at Elphinstone.

He wanted to ask Wickersham about another girl who was uppermost in his thoughts, but something restrained him. He could not bear to hear her name on his lips. By a curious coincidence, Wickersham suddenly said: "You used to teach at old Rawson's. Did you ever meet a girl named Yorke—Alice Yorke? She was down this way once."

Keith said that he had met "Miss Yorke." He had met her at Ridgely Springs and also in New York. He was glad that it was dark, and

that Wickersham could not see his face. "A very pretty girl," he hazarded as a leader, now that the subject was broached.

"Yes, rather. Going abroad—title-hunting."

"I don't expect Miss Yorke cares about a title," said Keith, stiffly.

"Mamma does. Failing that, she wants old Lancaster and perquisites."

"Who does? Why, Mr. Lancaster is old enough to be her father!"

"Pile's old, too," said Wickersham, dryly.

"She doesn't care about that either," said Keith, shortly.

"Oh, doesn't she! You know her mother?"

"No; I don't believe she does. Whatever her mother is, she is a fine, high-minded girl."

Ferdy gave a laugh which might have meant anything. It made Keith hot all over. Keith, fearing to trust himself further, changed the subject and asked after the Rawsons, Wickersham having mentioned that he had been staying with them.

"Phrony is back at home, I believe? She has been off to school. I hear she is very much improved?"

"I don't know; I didn't notice her particularly," said Wickersham, indifferently.

"She is very pretty. Jake Dennison thinks so," laughed Keith.

"Jake Dennison? Who is he?"

"He's an old scholar of mine. He is inside now on the front seat; one of your friends."

"Oh, that's the fellow! I thought I had seen him before. Well, he had better try some other stock, I guess. He may find that cornered. She is not going to take a clod like that."

Wickersham went off into a train of reflection.

"I say, Keith," he began unexpectedly, "maybe, you can help me about a matter, and if so I will make it worth your while."

"About what matter?" asked Keith, wondering.

"Why, about that old dolt Rawson's land. You see, the governor has got himself rather concerned. When he got this property up here in the mountains and started to build the railroad, some of these people here got wind of it. That fool, Rhodes, talked about it too much, and they bought up the lands around the old man's property. They think the governor has got to buy 'em out. Old Rawson is the head of 'em. The governor sent Halbrook down to get it; but Halbrook is a fool, too. He let him know he wanted to buy him out, and, of course, he raised.

You and he used to be very thick. He was talking of you the other night."

"He and I are great friends. I have a great regard for him, and a much higher opinion of his sense than you appear to have. He is a very shrewd man."

"Shrewd the deuce! He's an old blockhead. He has stumbled into the possession of some property which I am ready to pay him a fair price for. He took it for a cow-pasture. It isn't worth anything. It would only be a convenience to us to have it and prevent a row in the future, perhaps. That is the only reason I want it. Besides, his title to it ain't worth a ——, anyhow. We have patents that antedate his. You can tell him that the land is not worth anything. I will give you a good sum if you get him to name a price at, say, fifty per cent. on what he gave for it. I know what he gave for it. You can tell him it ain't worth anything to him and that his title is faulty."

"No, I could not," said Keith, shortly.

"Why not?"

"Because I think it is very valuable and his title perfect. And he knows it."

Wickersham glanced at him in the dusk.

"It isn't valuable at all," he said after a

pause. "I will give you a good fee if you will get through a deal for it at any price we may agree on. Come!"

"No," said Keith; "not for all the money you own. My advice to you is to go to Squire Rawson and either offer to take him in with you to the value of his lands, or else make him a direct offer for what those lands are really worth. He knows as much about the value of those lands as you or Mr. Halbrook or any one else knows. Take my word for it."

"Rats!" ejaculated Wickersham, briefly. "I tell you what," he added presently: "if he don't sell us that land he'll never get a cent out of it. No one else will ever take it. We have him cornered. We've got the land above him, and the water, too, and, what is more, his title is not worth a damn!"

"Well, that is his lookout. I expect you will find him able to take care of himself."

Wickersham gave a grunt, then he asked Keith suddenly:

"Do you know a man named Plume over there at Gumbolt?"

"Yes," said Keith; "he runs the paper there."

"Yes; that's he. What sort of a man is he?"

Keith gave a brief estimate of Mr. Plume: "You will see him and can judge for yourself."

"I always do," said Wickersham, briefly. "Know anybody can work him? The governor and he fell out some time ago, but I want to get hold of him."

Keith thought he knew one who might influence Mr. Plume; but he did not mention the name or sex.

"Who is that woman inside?" demanded Wickersham. "I mean the young one, with the eyes."

"They call her Terpsichore. She keeps the dance-hall."

"Friend of yours?"

"Yes." Keith spoke shortly.

The stage presently began to descend Hell-streak Hill, which Keith mentioned as the scene of the robbery which old Tim Gilsey had told him of. As it swung down the long descent, with the lights of the lamps flashing on the big tree-tops, and with the roar of the rushing water below them coming up as it boiled over the rocks, Wickersham conceived a higher opinion of Keith than he had had before, and he mentally resolved that the next time he came over that road he would make the trip in the daytime.

They had just crossed the little creek which dashed over the rocks toward the river, and had begun to ascend another hill, when Wickersham, who had been talking about his drag, was pleased to have Keith offer him the reins. He took them with some pride, and Keith dived down into the boot. When he sat up again he had a pistol in his hand.

"It was just about here that that 'hold-up' occurred."

"Suppose they should try to hold you up now, what would you do?" asked Wickersham.

"Oh, I don't think there is any danger now," said Keith. "I have driven over here at all hours and in all weathers. We are getting too civilized for that now, and most of the express comes over in a special wagon. It's only the mail and small packages that come on this stage."

"But if they should?" demanded Wickersham.

"Well, I suppose I'd whip up my horses and cut for it," said Keith.

"I wouldn't," asserted Wickersham. "I'd like to see any man make me run when I have a gun in my pocket."

Suddenly, as if in answer to his boast, there

was a flash in the road, and the report of a pistol under the very noses of the leaders, which made them swerve aside with a rattling of the swingle-bars, and twist the stage sharply over to the side of the road. At the same instant a dark figure was seen in the dim light which the lamp threw on the road, close beside one of the horses, and a voice was heard:

"I've got you now, —— you!"

It was all so sudden that Wickersham had not time to think. It seemed to him like a scene in a play rather than a reality. He instinctively shortened the reins and pulled up the frightened horses. Keith seized the reins with one hand and snatched at the whip with the other; but it was too late. Wickersham, hardly conscious of what he was doing, was clutching the reins with all his might, trying to control the leaders, whilst pandemonium broke out inside, cries from the women and oaths from the men.

There was another volley of oaths and another flash, and Wickersham felt a sharp little burn on the arm next Keith.

"Hold on!" he shouted. "For God's sake, don't shoot! Hold on! Stop the horses!"

At the same moment Keith disappeared over

Sprang over the edge of the road into the thick bushes below.

the wheel. He had fallen or sprung from his seat.

"The —— coward!" thought Wickersham. "He is running."

The next second there was a report of a pistol close beside the stage, and the man in the road at the horses' heads fired again. Another report, and Keith dashed forward into the light of the lantern and charged straight at the robber, who fired once more, and then, when Keith was within ten feet of him, turned and sprang over the edge of the road into the thick bushes below. Keith sprang straight after him, and the two went crashing through the underbrush, down the steep side of the hill.

The inmates of the stage poured out into the road, all talking together, and Wickersham, with the aid of Jake Dennison, succeeded in quieting the horses. The noise of the flight and the pursuit had now grown more distant, but once more several shots were heard, deep down in the woods, and then even they ceased.

It had all happened so quickly that the passengers had seen nothing. They demanded of Wickersham how many robbers there were. They were divided in their opinion as to the probable outcome. The men declared that

Keith had probably got the robber if he had not been killed himself at the last fire.

Terpsichore was in a passion of rage because the men had not jumped out instantly to Keith's rescue, and one of them had held her in the stage and prevented her from poking her head out to see the fight. In the light of the lantern Wickersham observed that she was handsome. He watched her with interest. There was something of the tiger in her lithe movement. She declared that she was going down into the woods herself to find Keith. She was sure he had been killed.

The men protested against this, and Jake Dennison and another man started to the rescue, whilst a grizzled, weather-beaten fellow caught and held her.

"Why, my darlint, I couldn't let you go down there. Why, you'd ruin your new bonnet," he said.

The young woman snatched the bonnet from her head and slung it in his face.

"You coward! Do you think I care for a bonnet when the best man in Gumbolt may be dying down in them woods?"

With a cuff on the ear as the man burst out laughing and put his hand on her to soothe her,

she turned and darted over the bank into the woods. Fortunately for the rest of her apparel, which must have suffered as much as the dishevelled bonnet,—which the grizzled miner had picked up and now held in his hand as carefully as if it were one of the birds which ornamented it,—some one was heard climbing up through the bushes toward the road a little distance ahead.

The men stepped forward and waited, each one with his hand in the neighborhood of his belt, whilst the women instinctively fell to the rear. The next moment Keith appeared over the edge of the road. As he stepped into the light it was seen that his face was bleeding and that his left arm hung limp at his side.

The men called to Terpy to come back: that Keith was there. A moment later she emerged from the bushes and clambered up the bank.

"Did you get him?" was the first question she asked.

"No." Keith gave the girl a swift glance, and turning quietly, he asked one of the men to help him off with his coat. In the light of the lamp he had a curious expression on his white face.

"Terpy was that skeered about you, she

swore she was goin' down there to help you,'' said the miner who still held the hat.

A box on the ear from the young woman stopped whatever further observation he was going to make.

'' Shut up. Don't you see he's hurt? '' She pushed away the man who was helping Keith off with his coat, and took his place.

No one who had seen her as she relieved Keith of the coat and with dexterous fingers, which might have been a trained nurse's, cut away the bloody shirt-sleeve, would have dreamed that she was the virago who, a few moments before, had been raging in the road, swearing like a trooper, and cuffing men's ears.

When the sleeve was removed it was found that Keith's arm was broken just above the elbow, and the blood was pouring from two small wounds. Terpy levied imperiously on the other passengers for handkerchiefs; then, not waiting for their contributions, suddenly lifting her skirt, whipped off a white petticoat, and tore it into strips. She soon had the arm bound up, showing real skill in her surgery. Once she whispered a word in his ear—a single name. Keith remained silent, but she read his answer, and went on with her work with a grim

look on her face. Then Keith mounted his box against the remonstrances of every one, and the passengers having reëntered the stage, Wickersham drove on into Gumbolt. His manner was more respectful to Keith than it had ever been before.

Within a half-hour after their arrival the sheriff and his party, with Dave Dennison at the head of the posse, were on their horses, headed for the scene of the "hold-up." Dave could have had half of Gumbolt for posse had he desired it. They attempted to get some information from Keith as to the appearance of the robber; but Keith failed to give any description by which one man might have been distinguished from the rest of the male sex.

"Could they expect a man to take particular notice of how another looked under such circumstances? He looked like a pretty big man."

Wickersham was able to give a more explicit description.

The pursuers returned a little after sunrise next morning without having found the robber.

CHAPTER XV

MRS. YORKE MAKES A MATCH

THE next day Keith was able to sit up, though the Doctor refused to let him go out of the house. He was alone in his room when a messenger announced that a woman wished to see him. When the visitor came up it was Terpy. She was in a state of suppressed excitement. Her face was white, her eyes glittered. Her voice as she spoke was tremulous with emotion.

"They're on to him," she said in a husky voice. "That man that comed over on the stage with you give a description of him, this mornin', 't made 'em tumble to him after we had throwed 'em off the track. If I ever git a show at him! They knows 'twas Bill. That little devil Dennison is out ag'in."

"Oh, they won't catch him," said Keith; but as he spoke his face changed. "What if he should get drunk and come into town?" he asked himself.

"If they git him, they'll hang him," pursued the girl, without heeding him. "They're all up. You are so popular."

"Me?" exclaimed Keith, laughing.

"It's so," said the girl, gravely. "That Dave Dennison would kill anybody for you, and they're ag'in' Bill, all of 'em."

"Can't you get word to him?" began Keith, and paused. He looked at her keenly. "You must keep him out of the way."

"He's wounded. You got him in the shoulder. He's got to see a doctor. The ball's still in there."

"I knew it," said Keith, quietly.

The girl gazed at him a moment, and then looked away.

"That was the reason I have been a-pesterin' you, goin' back'ards and for'ards. I hope you will excuse me of it," she said irrelevantly.

Keith sat quite still for a moment, as it all came over him. It was, then, him that the man was after, not robbery, and this girl, unable to restrain her discarded suitor without pointing suspicion to him, had imperilled her life for Keith, when he was conceited enough to more than half accept the hints of strangers that she cared for him.

"We must get him away," he said, rising painfully. "Where is he?"

"He's hid in a house down the road. I have flung 'em off the track by abusin' of him. They know I am against him, and they think I am after you," she said, looking at him with frank eyes; "and I have been lettin' 'em think it," she added quietly.

Keith almost gasped. Truly this girl was past his comprehension.

"We must get him away," he said.

"How can we do it?" she asked. "They suspicion he's here, and the pickets are out. If he warn't hit in the shoulder so bad, he could fight his way out. He ain't afraid of none of 'em," she added, with a flash of the old pride. "I could go with him and help him; I have done it before; but I would have to break up here. He's got to see a doctor."

Keith sat in reflection for a moment.

"Tim Gilsey is going to drive the stage over to Eden to-night. Go down and see if the places are all taken."

"I have got a place on it," she said, "on the boot."

As Keith looked at her, she added in explanation:

"I take it regular, so as to have it when I want it."

Under Keith's glance she turned away her eyes.

"I am going to Eden to-night," said Keith.

She looked puzzled.

"If you could get old Tim to stop at that house for five minutes till I give Bluffy a letter to Dr. Balsam over at the Springs, I think we might arrange it. My clothes will fit him. You will have to see Uncle Tim."

Her countenance lit up.

"You mean you would stop there and let him take your place?"

"Yes."

The light of craft that must have been in Delilah's eyes when Samson lay at her feet was in her face. She sprang up.

"I will never forgit you, and Bill won't neither. He knows now what a hound he has been. When you let him off last night after he had slipped on the rock, he says that was enough for him. Before he will ever pull a pistol on you ag'in, he says he will blow his own brains out; and he will, or I will for him." She looked capable of it as she stood with glowing eyes and after a moment held out her hand. She

appeared about to speak, but reflected and turned away.

When the girl left Keith's room a few moments later, she carried a large bundle under her arm, and that night the stage stopped in the darkness at a little shanty at the far end of the fast-growing street, and Keith descended painfully and went into the house. Whilst the stage waited, old Tim attempted to do something to the lamp on that side, and in turning it down he put it out. Just then Keith, with his arm in a sling and wrapped in a heavy coat, came out, and was helped by old Tim up to the seat beside him. The stage arrived somewhat ahead of time at the point which the railroad had now reached, and old Tim, without waiting for daylight, took the trouble to hire a buggy and send the wounded man on, declaring that it was important that he should get to a hospital as soon as possible.

Amusements were scarce in Gumbolt, and Ferdy Wickersham had been there only a day or two when, under Mr. Plume's guidance, he sought the entertainment of Terpsichore's Hall. He had been greatly struck by Terpy that night on the road, when she had faced down the men

and had afterwards bound up Keith's arm. He had heard from Plume rumors of her frequent trips over the road and jests of her fancy for Keith. He would test it. It would break the monotony and give zest to the pursuit to make an inroad on Keith's preserve. When he saw her on the little stage he was astonished at her dancing. Why, the girl was an artist! As good a figure, as active a tripper, as high a kicker, as dainty a pair of ankles as he had seen in a long time, not to mention a keen pair of eyes with the devil peeping from them. To his surprise, he found Terpy stony to his advances. Her eyes glittered with dislike for him.

He became one of the highest players that had ever entered the gilded apartment on Terpsichore's second floor; he ordered more champagne than any man in Gumbolt; but for all this he failed to ingratiate himself with its presiding genius. Terpsichore still looked at him with level eyes in which was a cold gleam, and when she showed her white teeth it was generally to emphasize some gibe at him. One evening, after a little passage at arms, Wickersham chucked her under the chin and called her "Darling." Terpsichore wheeled on him.

"Keep your dirty hands to yourself," she

said, with a flash in her eye, and gave him such a box on the ear as made his head ring. The men around broke into a guffaw.

Wickersham was more than angry; he was enraged. He had heard a score of men call her by endearing names. He had also seen some of them get the same return that he received; but none so vicious. He sprang to his feet, his face flushed. The next second his senses returned, and he saw that he must make the best of it.

"You vixen!" he said, with a laugh, and caught the girl by the wrist. "I will make you pay for that." As he tried to draw her to him, she whipped from her dress a small stiletto which she wore as an ornament, and drew it back.

"Let go, or I'll drive it into you," she said, with fire darting from her eyes; and Wickersham let go amid the laughter and jeers of those about them, who were egging the girl on and calling to her to "give it to him."

Wickersham after this tried to make his peace, but without avail. Though he did not know it, Terpsichore had in her heart a feeling of hate which was relentless. It was his description that had set the sheriff's posse on the track of her dissipated lover, and though she

had "washed her hands of Bill Bluffy," as she said, she could not forgive the man who had injured him.

Then Wickersham, having committed one error, committed another. He tried to get revenge, and the man who sets out to get revenge on a woman starts on a sad journey. At least, it was so with Wickersham.

He attributed the snubbing he had received to the girl's liking for Keith, and he began to meditate how he should get even with them. The chance presented itself, as he thought, when one night he attended a ball at the Windsor. It was a gay occasion, for the Wickershams had opened their first mine, and Gumbolt's future was assured. The whole of Gumbolt was there—at least, all of those who did not side with Mr. Drummond, the Methodist preacher. Terpsichore was there, and Keith, who danced with her. She was the handsomest-dressed woman in the throng, and, to Wickersham's surprise, she was dressed with some taste, and her manners were quiet and subdued.

Toward morning the scene became hilarious, and a call was made for Terpsichore to give a Spanish dance. The girl held back, but her

admirers were in no mood for refusal, and the call became insistent. Keith had gone to his room, but Wickersham was still there, and his champagne had flowed freely. At length the girl yielded, and, after a few words with the host of the Windsor, she stepped forward and began to dance.

She danced in such a way that the applause made the brass chandeliers ring. Even Wickersham, though he hated her, could not but admire her.

Keith, who had found it useless to try to sleep even in a remote corner of the hotel, returned just then, and whether it was that Terpsichore caught sight of him as she glanced his way, or that she caught sight of Wickersham's hostile face, she faltered and stopped suddenly.

Wickersham thought she had broken down, and, under the influence of the champagne, turned with a jeer to Plume.

"She can't dance, Plume," he called across to the editor, who was at some little distance in the crowd.

Those nearest to the dancer urged her to continue, but she had heard Wickersham's jeer, and she suddenly faced him and, pointing her

long, bare arm toward him, said: "Put that man out, or I won't go on."

Wickersham gave a laugh. "Go on? You can't go on," he said, trying to steady himself on his feet. "You can't dance any more than a cow."

He had never heard before the hum of an angry crowd.

"Throw him out! Fling him out of the window!" were the words he caught.

In a second a score of men were about him, and more than a score were rushing in his direction with a sound that brought him quickly to his senses.

Fortunately two men with cool heads were near by. With a spring Keith and a short, stout young fellow with gray eyes were making their way to his side, dragging men back, throwing them aside, expostulating, ordering, and, before anything else had happened than the tearing of his coat half off of his back, Wickersham found himself with Keith and Dave Dennison standing in front of him, defending him against the angry revellers.

The determined air of the two officers held the assailants in check long enough for them to get their attention, and, after a moment, order

was restored on condition that Wickersham should "apologize to the lady and leave town."

This Wickersham, well sobered by the handling he had received, was willing to do, and he was made to walk up and offer a humble apology to Terpsichore, who accepted it with but indifferent grace.

That winter the railroad reached Gumbolt, and Gumbolt, or New Leeds, as it was now called, sprang at once, so to speak, from a chrysalis to a full-fledged butterfly with wings unfolding in the sun of prosperity.

Lands that a year or two before might have been had for a song, and mineral rights that might have been had for less than a song, were now held at fabulous prices.

Keith was sitting at his table, one day, writing, when there was a heavy step outside, and Squire Rawson walked in on him.

When all matters of mutual interest had been talked over, the squire broached the real object of his visit; at least, he began to approach it. He took out his pipe and filled it.

"Well, it's come," he said.

"What has come?"

"The railroad. That young man Rhodes said

'twas comin', and so it's done. He was something of a prophet." The old fellow chuckled softly and lit his pipe. "That there friend of yours, Mr. Wickersham, is been down here ag'in. Kind o' hangs around. What's he up to?"

Keith laughed.

"Well, it's pretty hard to tell what Wickersham is up to,—at least, by what he says,—especially when you don't tell me what he is doing."

The old man looked pleased. Keith had let him believe that he did not know what he was talking of, and had expressed an opinion in which he agreed.

"That's what I think. Well, it's about my land up here."

Keith looked relieved.

"Has he made you another offer for it?"

"No; he ain't done that, and he won't do it. That's what I tells him. If he wants it, let him make me a good offer; but he won't do that. He kind o' circles around like a pigeon before he lights, and talks about what I paid for it, and a hundred per cent. advance, and all that. I give a sight for that land he don't know nothin' about—years of hard work on the mountain-

side, sweatin' o' days, and layin' out in the cold at nights, lookin' up at the stars and wonderin' how I was to git along—studyin' of folks jest as I studied cattle. That's what I paid for that land. He wants me to set him a price, and I won't do that—he might give it." He looked shrewdly at Keith. "Ain't I right?"

"I think so."

"He wants me to let him have control of it; but I ain't a-goin' to do that neither."

"That's certainly right," said Keith, heartily.

"I tell him I'm a-goin' to hold to that for Phrony. Phrony says she wants me to sell it to him, too. But women-folks don't know about business."

Keith wondered what effect this piece of information had on Wickersham, and also what further design the old squire had in mind.

"I think it's about time to do something with that land. If all he says is true,—not about *my* land (he makes out as *my* land is situate too far away ever to be much account—fact is, he don't allow I've got any land; he says it's all his anyway), but about other lands—everybody else's land but mine,—it might be a good time to look around. I know as my land is the best

land up here. I holds the key to the situation. That's what we used to call it durin' the war.

"Well, there ain't but three ways to git to them coal-lands back up yonder in the Gap: one's by way of heaven, and I 'lows there ain't many land-speculators goin' by that way; the other is through hell, a way they'll know more about hereafter; and the third's through my land."

Keith laughed and waited.

"He seems to be hangin' around Phrony pretty considerable?"

Keith caught the gleam in the old fellow's deep eye, and looked away.

"I can't make it out. Phrony she likes him."

Keith fastened his gaze on something out of the window.

"I don't know him," pursued the squire. "But I don't think—he'd suit Phrony. His ways ain't like ours, and—." He lapsed into reflection, and Keith, with his eyes still fastened on something outside the window, sighed to think of the old man's innocence. That he should imagine that Wickersham had any serious idea of marrying the granddaughter of a backwoods magistrate! The old squire broke the silence.

"You don't suppose he could be hankerin' after Phrony for her property, do you?"

"No, I do not," said Keith, positively, relieved that at last a question was put which he could answer directly.

"Because she ain't got any," asserted the squire. "She's got prospects; but I'm goin' to remove them. It don't do for a young woman to have too much prospects. I'm goin' to sell that land and git it down in cash, where I can do what I want with it. And I want you to take charge of it for me."

This, then, was the real object of his visit. He wanted Keith to take charge of his properties. It was a tempting offer to make Keith. The old man had been a shrewd negotiator.

There is no success so sweet as that which comes to a young man.

That night Keith spent out under the stars. Success had come. And its other name was Alice Yorke.

The way before Keith still stretched steep enough, but the light was on it, the sunshine caught peak after peak high up among the clouds themselves, and crowning the highest point, bathed in perpetual sunlight, was the image of Alice Yorke.

Alice Yorke had been abroad now for some time; but he had followed her. Often when his work was done he had locked his door and shut himself in from the turmoil of the bustling, noisy throng outside to dream of her—to read and study that he might become worthy of her.

He had just seen by the papers that Alice Yorke had returned.

She had escaped the dangers of a foreign service; but, by the account, she was the belle of the season at the watering-place which she was honoring with her presence. As he read the account, a little jealousy crept into the satisfaction which he had felt as he began. Mr. Lancaster was spoken of too pointedly; and there was mention of too many yacht-parties and entertainments in which their names appeared together.

In fact, the forces exerted against Alice Yorke had begun to tell. Her mother, overawed by her husband's determination, had reluctantly abandoned her dreams of a foreign title with its attendant honors to herself, and, of late, had turned all her energies to furthering the suit of Mr. Lancaster. It would be a great establishment that he would give Alice, and no name in the country stood higher. He was the

soul of honor, personal and commercial; and in an age when many were endeavoring to amass great fortunes and make a dazzling display, he was content to live modestly, and was known for his broad-minded philanthropy. What did it matter that he was considerably older than Alice? reflected Mrs. Yorke. Mrs. Creamer and half the mothers she knew would give their eyes to secure him for their daughters; and certainly he had shown that he knew how to enter into Alice's feelings.

Even Mr. Yorke had begun to favor Mr. Lancaster after Mrs. Yorke had skilfully pointed out that Alice's next most attentive admirer was Ferdy Wickersham.

"Why, I thought he was still trying to get that Caldwell girl," said he.

"You know he cannot get her; she is married," replied Mrs. Yorke.

"I guess that would make precious little difference to that young man, if she would say the word. I wish he would keep away from here."

"Oh, Ferdy is no worse than some others; you were always unjust to him. Most young men sow their wild oats."

No man likes to be charged with injustice by

his wife, and Mr. Yorke's tone showed that he was no exception to this rule.

"He is worse than most others *I* know, and the crop of oats he is sowing, if he does not look out, he will reap somewhere else besides in New York. Alice shall marry whom she pleases, provided it is not that young man; but she shall not marry him if she wants to."

"She does not want to marry him," said Mrs. Yorke; "if she had she could have done it long ago."

"Not while I lived," said Mr. Yorke, firmly. But from this time Mr. Yorke began to acquiesce in his wife's plans touching Mr. Lancaster.

Finally Alice herself began to yield. The influences were very strong, and were skilfully exerted. The only man who had ever made any lasting impression on her heart was, she felt, out of the question. The young school-teacher, with his pride and his scorn of modern ways, had influenced her life more than any one else she had ever known, and though under her mother's management the feeling had gradually subsided, and had been merged into what was merely a cherished recollection, Memory, stirred at times by some picture or story of heroism and devotion, reminded her that she

too might, under other conditions, have had a real romance. Still, after two or three years, her life appeared to have been made for her by Fate, and she yielded, not recognizing that Fate was only a very ambitious and somewhat short-sighted mamma aided by the conditions of an artificial state of life known as fashionable society.

Keith wrote Alice Yorke a letter congratulating her upon her safe return; but a feeling, part shyness, part pride, seized him. He had received no acknowledgment of his last letter. Why should he write again? He mailed the letter in the waste-basket. Now, however, that success had come to him, he wrote her a brief note congratulating her upon her return, a stiff little plea for remembrance. He spoke of his good fortune: he was the agent for the most valuable lands in that region, and the future was beginning to look very bright. Business, he said, might take him North before long, and the humming-birds would show him the way to the fairest roses. The hope of seeing her shone in every line. It reached Alice Yorke in the midst of preparation for her marriage.

Alice Yorke sat for some time in meditation over this letter. It brought back vividly the

time which she had never wholly forgotten. Often, in the midst of scenes so gay and rich as to amaze her, she had recalled the springtime in the budding woods, with an ardent boy beside her, worshipping her with adoring eyes. She had lived close to Nature then, and Content once or twice peeped forth at her from its covert with calm and gentle eyes. She had known pleasure since then, joy, delight, but never content. However, it was too late now. Mr. Lancaster and her mother had won the day; she had at last accepted him and an establishment. She had accepted her fate or had made it.

She showed the letter to her mother. Mrs. Yorke's face took on an inscrutable expression.

"You are not going to answer it, of course?" she said.

"Of course, I am; I am going to write him the nicest letter that I know how to write. He is one of the best friends I ever had."

"What will Mr. Lancaster say?"

"Mr. Lancaster quite understands. He is going to be reasonable; that is the condition."

This appeared to be satisfactory to Mrs. Yorke, or, at least, she said no more.

Alice's letter to Keith was friendly and even kind. She had never forgotten him, she said.

Some day she hoped to meet him again. Keith read this with a pleasant light in his eyes. He turned the page, and his face suddenly whitened. She had a piece of news to tell him which might surprise him. She was engaged to be married to an old friend of her family's, Mr. Lancaster. He had met Mr. Lancaster, she remembered, and was sure he would like him, as Mr. Lancaster had liked him so much.

Keith sat long over this letter, his face hard set and very white. She was lost to him. He had not known till then how largely he had built his life upon the memory of Alice Yorke. Deep down under everything that he had striven for had lain the foundation of his hope to win her. It went down with a crash. He went to his room, and unlocking his desk, took from his drawer a small package of letters and other little mementos of the past that had been so sweet. These he put in the fire and, with a grim face, watched them blaze and burn to ashes. She was dead to him. He reserved nothing.

The newspapers described the Yorke-Lancaster wedding as one of the most brilliant affairs of the season. They dwelt particularly on the fortunes of both parties, the value of the pres-

ents, and the splendor of the dresses worn on the occasion. One journal mentioned that Mr. Lancaster was considerably older than the bride, and was regarded as one of the best, because one of the safest, matches to be found in society.

Keith recalled Mr. Lancaster: dignified, cultivated, and coldly gracious. Then he recalled his gray hair, and found some satisfaction in it. He recalled, too, Mrs. Yorke's friendliness for him. This, then, was what it meant. He wondered to himself how he could have been so blind to it.

When he came to think of it, Mr. Lancaster came nearer possessing what others strove for than any one else he knew. Yet, Youth looks on Youth as peculiarly its own, and Keith found it hard to look on Alice Yorke's marriage as anything but a sale.

"They talk about the sin of selling negroes," he said; "that is as very a sale as ever took place at a slave-auction."

For a time he plunged into the gayest life that Gumbolt offered. He even began to visit Terpsichore. But this was not for long. Mr. Plume's congratulations were too distasteful to him for him to stomach them; and Terpy began

to show her partiality too plainly for him to take advantage of it. Besides, after all, though Alice Yorke had failed him, it was treason to the ideal he had so long carried in his heart. This still remained to him.

He went back to his work, resolved to tear from his heart all memory of Alice Yorke. She was married and forever beyond his dreams. If he had worked before with enthusiasm, he now worked with fury. Mr. Lancaster, as wealthy as he was, as completely equipped with all that success could give, lacked one thing that Keith possessed: he lacked the promise of the Future. Keith would show these Yorkes who he was.

CHAPTER XVI

KEITH VISITS NEW YORK, AND MRS. LANCASTER SEES A GHOST

FOR the next year or two the tide set in very strong toward the mountains, and New Leeds advanced with giant strides. What had been a straggling village a year or two before was now a town, and was beginning to put on the airs of a city. Brick buildings quite as pretentious as the town were springing up where a year before there were unsightly frame boxes; the roads where hogs had wallowed in mire not wholly of their own kneading were becoming well-paved streets. Out on the heights, where had been a forest, were sprinkled sightly dwellings in pretty yards. The smoke of panting engines rose where but a few years back old Tim Gilsey drew rein over his steaming horses. Pretty girls and well-dressed women began to parade the sidewalks where formerly Terpsichore's skirts were the only feminine attire

seen. And "Gordon Keith, civil and mining engineer," with his straight figure and tanned, manly face, was not ignored by them. But locked in his heart was the memory of the girl he had found in the Spring woods. She was forever beyond him; but he still clung to the picture he had enshrined there.

When he saw Dr. Balsam, no reference was made to the verification of the latter's prophecy; but the young man knew from the kind tone in the older man's voice that he had heard of it. Meantime Keith had not been idle. Surveys and plats had been made, and everything done to facilitate placing the Rawson properties on the market.

When old man Rawson came to New Leeds now, he made Keith's little office his headquarters, and much quaint philosophy Keith learned from him.

"I reckon it's about time to try our cattle in the New York market," he said at length to Keith. It was a joke he never gave up. "You go up there and look around, and if you have any trouble send for me."

So, taking his surveys and reports and a few letters of introduction, Keith went to New York.

Only one thought marred Keith's joy: the

dearest aim he had so long had in view had disappeared. The triumph of standing before Alice Yorke and offering her the reward of his endeavor was gone. All he could do was to show her what she had lost. This he would do; he would win life's highest honors. He grew grim with resolve.

Something of this triumphant feeling showed in his mien and in his face as he plunged into the crowded life of the city. From the time he passed into the throng that streamed up the long platforms of the station and poured into the wide ferry-boats, like grain pouring through a mill, he felt the thrill of the life. This was what he had striven for. He would take his place here and show what was in him.

He had forgotten how gay the city life was. Every place of public resort pleased him: theatres, hotels, beer-gardens; but best of all the streets. He took them all in with absolute freedom and delight.

Business was the watchword, the trade-mark. It buzzed everywhere, from the Battery to the Park. It thronged the streets, pulsating through the outlets and inlets at ferries and railway-stations and crossings, and through the great buildings that were already beginning to

tower in the business sections. It hummed in the chief centres. And through it all and beyond it all shone opulence, opulence gilded and gleaming and dazzling in its glitter: in the big hotels; in the rich shops; in the gaudy theatres; along the fine avenues: a display of wealth to make the eyes ache; an exhibition of riches never seen before. It did Keith good at first just to stand in the streets and watch the pageant as it passed like a gilded panorama. Of the inner New York he did not yet know: the New York of luxurious homes; of culture and of art; of refinement and elegance. The New York that has grown up since, with its vast wealth, its brazen glitter, its tides that roll up riches as the sea rolls up the sand, was not yet. It was still in its infancy, a chrysalis as yet sleeping within its golden cocoon.

Keith had no idea there were so many handsome and stylish young women in the world as he now saw. He had forgotten how handsome the American girl is in her best appointment. They sailed down the avenue looking as fine as young fillies at a show, or streamed through the best shopping streets as though not only the shops, but the world belonged to them, and it

were no longer the meek, but the proud, that inherit the earth.

If in the throngs on the streets there were often marked contrasts, Keith was too exhilarated to remark it—at least, at first. If women with worn faces and garments unduly thin in the frosty air, carrying large bundles in their pinched hands, hurried by as though hungry, not only for food, but for time in which to earn food; if sad-eyed men with hollow cheeks, sunken chests, and threadbare clothes shambled eagerly along, he failed to note them in his first keen enjoyment of the pageant. Old clothes meant nothing where he came from; they might be the badge of perilous enterprise and well-paid industry, and food and fire were at least common to all.

Keith, indeed, moved about almost in a trance, absorbing and enjoying the sights. It was Humanity in flood; Life at full tide.

Many a woman and not a few men turned to take a second look at the tanned, eager face and straight, supple figure, as, with smiling, yet keen, eyes, he stalked along with the free, swinging gait caught on the mountains, so different from the quick, short steps of the city man. Beggars, and some who from their look and

apparel might not have been beggars, applied to him so often that he said to one of them, a fairly well-dressed man with a nose of a slightly red tinge:

"Well, I must have a very benevolent face or a very credulous one?"

"You have," said the man, with brazen frankness, pocketing the half-dollar given him on his tale of a picked pocket and a remittance that had gone wrong.

Keith laughed and passed on.

Meantime, Keith was making some discoveries. He did not at first call on Norman Wentworth. He had a feeling that it might appear as if he were using his friendship for a commercial purpose. He presented his business letters. His letters, however, failed to have the weight he had expected. The persons whom he had met down in New Leeds, during their brief visits there, were, somehow, very different when met in New York. Some whom he called on were civil enough to him; but as soon as he broached his business they froze up. The suggestion that he had coal-property to sell sent them down to zero. Their eyes would glint with a shrewd light and their faces harden into ice. One or

two told him plainly that they had no money to embark in "wild-cat schemes."

Mr. Creamer of Creamer, Crustback & Company, Capitalists, a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a strongly cut nose and chin and keen, gray eyes, that, through long habitude, weighed chances with an infallible appraisement, to whom Keith had a letter from an acquaintance, one of those casual letters that mean anything or nothing, informed him frankly that he had "neither time nor inclination to discuss enterprises, ninety-nine out of every hundred of which were frauds, and the hundredth generally a failure."

"This is not a fraud," said Keith, hotly, rising. "I do not indorse frauds, sir." He began to draw on his gloves. "If I cannot satisfy any reasonable man of the fact I state, I am willing to fail. I ought to fail." With a bow, he turned to the door.

Something in Keith's assurance went further with the shrewd-eyed capitalist than his politeness had done. He shot a swift glance as he was retiring toward the door.

"Why didn't Wickersham make money down there?" he demanded, half in query, half in

denial, gazing keenly over his gold-rimmed glasses. "He usually makes money, even if others lose it."

Mr. Creamer had his own reasons for not liking Wickersham.

Keith was standing at the door.

"For two or three reasons. One was that he underestimated the people who live down there, and thought he could force them into selling him their lands, and so lost the best properties there."

"The lands you have, I suppose?" said the banker, looking again at Keith quickly.

"Yes, the lands I have, though you don't believe it," said Keith, looking him calmly in the eyes.

The banker was gazing at the young man ironically; but, as he observed him, his credulity began to give way.

That stamp of truth which men recognize was written on him unmistakably. Mr. Creamer's mind worked quickly.

"By the way, you came from down there. Did you know a young man named Rhodes? He was an engineer. Went over the line."

Keith's eyes brightened. "He is one of my best friends. He is in Russia now."

Mr. Creamer nodded. "What do you think of him?"

"He is one of the best."

Mr. Creamer nodded. He did not think it necessary to tell Keith that Rhodes was paying his addresses to his daughter.

"You write to him," said Keith. "He will tell you just what I have. Tell him they are the Rawson lands."

Keith opened the door. "Good morning, sir."

"One moment!" Mr. Creamer leaned back in his chair. "Whom else do you know here?" he asked after a second.

Keith reflected a moment.

"I know Mr. Wentworth."

"Norman Wentworth?"

"Yes; I know him very well. He is an old friend of mine."

"Have you been to him?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because my relations with him are entirely personal. We used to be warm friends, and I did not wish to use his friendship for me as a ground on which to approach him in a commercial enterprise."

Mr. Creamer's countenance expressed more incredulity than he intended to show.

"He might feel under obligations to do for me what he would not be inclined to do otherwise," Keith explained.

"Oh, I don't think you need have any apprehension on that score," Mr. Creamer said, with a glint of amusement in his eyes. "It is a matter of business, and I don't think you will find business men here overstepping the bounds of prudence from motives of sentiment."

"There is no man whom I would rather have go into it with me; but I shall not ask him to do it, for the reason I have given. Good morning."

The banker did not take his eyes from the door until the sound of Keith's steps had died away through his outer office. Then he reflected for a moment. Presently he touched a bell, and a clerk appeared in the door.

"Write a note to Mr. Norman Wentworth and ask him to drop in to see me—any time this afternoon."

"Yes, sir."

When Norman Wentworth called at Mr. Creamer's office he found the financier in a good humor. The market had gone well of late,

and Mr. Creamer's moods were not altogether unlike the mercury. His greeting was more cordial than usual. After a brief discussion of recent events, he pushed a card across to his visitor and asked casually:

"What do you know about that man?"

"Gordon Keith!" exclaimed the younger man, in surprise. "Is he in New York, and I have not seen him! Why, I know all about him. He used to be an old friend of mine. We were boys together ever so long ago."

He went on to speak warmly of him.

"Well, that was long ago," said Mr. Creamer, doubtfully. "Many things have happened in that time. He has had time to change."

"He must have changed a good deal if he is not straight," declared Norman. "I wonder why he has not been to see me?"

"Well, I'll tell you what he said," began Mr. Creamer.

He gave Keith's explanation.

"Did he say that? Then it's true. You ought to know his father. He is a regular old Don Quixote."

"The Don was not particularly practical. He would not have done much with coal and iron lands," observed the banker. "What do you

know about this man's knowledge of such things?''

Norman admitted that on this point he had no information.

''He says he knows Wickersham—your friend,'' said Mr. Creamer, with a sly look at Norman.

''Yes, I expect he does—if any one knows him. He used to know him. What does he say of him?''

''Oh, I think he knows him. Well, I am much obliged to you for coming around,'' he said in a tone of dismissal. ''You are coming to dine with us soon, I believe? The Lancasters are coming, too. And we expect Rhodes home. He's due next week.''

''One member of your family will be glad to see him,'' said Norman, smiling. ''The wedding is to take place in a few weeks, I believe?''

''I hear so,'' said the father. ''Fine young man, Rhodes? Your cousin, isn't he? Been very successful?''

''Yes.''

Once, as Keith passed along down Broadway, just where some of the great shops were at that time, before the tide had rolled so far uptown, a handsome carriage and pair drew up

in front of one of the big shops, and a lady stepped from it just behind him. She was a very pretty young woman, and richly dressed. A straight back and a well-set head, with a perfect toilet, gave her distinction even among the handsomely appointed women who thronged the street that sunny morning, and many a woman turned and looked at her with approval or envy.

The years, that had wrought Keith from a plain country lad into a man of affairs of such standing in New Leeds that a shrewd operator like Rawson had selected him for his representative, had also wrought a great change in Alice Lancaster. Alice had missed what she had once begun to expect, romance and all that it meant; but she had filled with dignity the place she had chosen. If Mr. Lancaster's absorption in serious concerns left her life more sombre than she had expected, at least she let no one know it. Association with a man like Mr. Lancaster had steadied and elevated her. His high-mindedness had lifted her above the level of her worldly mother and of many of those who constituted the set in which she lived.

He admired her immeasurably. He was constantly impressed by the difference between her and her shallow-minded and silly mother, or

even between her and such a young woman as Mrs. Wentworth, who lived only for show and extravagance, and appeared in danger of ruining her husband and wrecking his happiness.

It was Mrs. Lancaster who descended from her carriage as Keith passed by. Just as she was about to enter the shop, a well-knit figure with square shoulders and springy step, swinging down the street, caught her eye. She glanced that way and gave an exclamation. The door was being held open for her by a blank-faced automaton in a many-buttoned uniform; so she passed in, but pausing just inside, she glanced back through the window. The next instant she left the shop and gazed down the street again. But Keith had turned a corner, and so Alice Lancaster did not see him, though she stood on tiptoe to try and distinguish him again in the crowd.

"Well, I would have sworn that that was Gordon Keith," she said to herself, as she turned away, "if he had not been so broad-shouldered and good-looking." And wherever she moved the rest of the day her eyes wandered up and down the street.

Once, as she was thus engaged, Ferdy Wick-

ersham came up. He was dressed in the tip of the fashion and looked very handsome.

"Who is the happy man?"

The question was so in keeping with her thought that she blushed unexpectedly.

"No one."

"Ah, not me, then? But I know it was some one. No woman looks so expectant and eager for 'no one.' "

"Do you think I am like you, perambulating streets trying to make conquests?" she said, with a smile.

"You do not have to try," he answered lazily. "You do it simply by being on the street. I am playing in great luck to-day."

"Have you seen Louise this morning?" she asked.

He looked her full in the face. "I see no one but you when you are around."

She laughed lightly.

"Ferdy, you will begin to believe that after a while, if you do not stop saying it so often."

"I shall never stop saying it, because it is true," he replied imperturbably, turning his dark eyes on her, the lids a little closed.

"You have got so in the habit of saying it that you repeat it like my parrot that I taught

once, when I was younger and vainer, to say, 'Pretty Alice.' He says it all the time."

"Sensible bird," said Mr. Wickersham, calmly. "Come and drive me up to the Park and let's have a stroll. I know such a beautiful walk. There are so many people out to-day. I saw the lady of the 'cat-eyes and cat-claws' go by just now, seeking some one whom she can turn again and rend." It was the name she had given Mrs. Nailor.

"I do not care who is out. Are you going to the Wentworths' this evening?" she asked irrelevantly.

"No; I rarely go there. Will you mention that to Mrs. Nailor? She apparently has not that confidence in my word that I could have expected in one so truthful as herself."

Mrs. Lancaster laughed.

"Ferdy—" she began, and then paused irresolute. "However—"

"Well, what is it? Say it."

"You ought not to go there so often as you do."

"Why?" His eyes were full of insolence.

"Good-by. Drive home," she said to the coachman, in a tone intentionally loud enough for her friend to hear.

Ferdy Wickersham strolled on down the street, and a few minutes later was leaning in at the door of Mrs. Wentworth's carriage, talking very earnestly to the lady inside.

Mr. Wickersham's attentions to Louise Wentworth had begun to be the talk of the town. Young Mrs. Wentworth was not a person to allow herself to be shelved. She did not propose that the older lady who bore that name should be known by it. She declared she would play second fiddle to no one. But she discovered that the old lady who lived in the old mansion on Washington Square was "Mrs. Wentworth," and that Mrs. Wentworth occupied a position from which she was not to be moved. After a little she herself was known as "Mrs. Norman." It was the first time Mrs. Norman had ever had command of much money. Her mother had made a good appearance and dressed her daughter handsomely, but to carry out her plans she had had to stint and scrape to make both ends meet. Mrs. Caldwell told one of her friends that her rings knew the way to the pawnbroker's so well that if she threw them in the street they would roll into his shop.

This struggle Louise had witnessed with that easy indifference which was part her nature

and part her youth. She had been brought up to believe she was a beauty, and she did believe it. Now that she had the chance, she determined to make the most of her triumph. She would show people that she knew how to spend money; embellishment was the aim of her life, and she did show them. Her toilets were the richest; her equipage was the handsomest and best appointed. Her entertainments soon were among the most splendid in the city.

Those who were accustomed to wealth and to parade wondered both at Mrs. Norman's tastes and at her gratification of them.

All the town applauded. They had had no idea that the Wentworths, as rich as they knew them to be, had so much money.

"She must have Aladdin's lamp," they said.

Only old Mrs. Wentworth looked grave and disapproving at the extravagance of her daughter-in-law. Still she never said a word of it, and when the grandson came she was too overjoyed to complain of anything.

It was only of late that people had begun to whisper of the frequency with which Ferdy Wickersham was seen with Mrs. Norman. Certain it was that he was with her a great deal.

That evening Alice Lancaster was dining with the Norman Wentworths. She was equally good friends with them and with their children, who on their part idolized her and considered her to be their especial property. Her appearance was always the signal for a romp. Whenever she went to the Wentworths' she always paid a visit to the nursery, from which she would return breathless and dishevelled, with an expression of mingled happiness and pain in her blue eyes. Louise Wentworth knew well why the longing look was there, and though usually cold and statuesque, she always softened to Alice Lancaster then more than she was wont to do.

"Alice pines for children," she said to Norman, who pinched her cheek and, like a man, told her she thought every one as romantic and as affectionate as herself. Had Mrs. Nailor heard this speech she would have blinked her innocent eyes and have purred with silent thoughts on the blindness of men.

This evening Mrs. Lancaster had come down from the nursery, where shouts of childish merriment had told of her romps with the ringletted young brigand who ruled there, and was sitting quite silent in the deep arm-chair in an atti-

tude of profound reflection, her head thrown back, her white arms resting languidly on the arms of the chair, her face unusually thoughtful, her eyes on the gilded ceiling.

Mrs. Wentworth watched her for a moment silently, and then said:

"You must not let the boy tyrannize over you so."

Mrs. Lancaster's reply was complete:

"I love it; I just love it!"

Presently Mrs. Wentworth spoke again.

"What is the matter with you this evening? You seem quite distrait."

"I saw a ghost to-day." She spoke without moving.

Mrs. Wentworth's face took on more interest.

"What do you mean? Who was it?"

"I mean I saw a ghost; I might say two ghosts, for I saw in imagination also the ghost of myself as I was when a girl. I saw the man I was in love with when I was seventeen."

"I thought you were in love with Ferdy then?"

"No; never." She spoke with sudden emphasis.

"How interesting! And you congratulated yourself on your escape? We always do. I

was violently in love with a little hotel clerk, with oily hair, a snub-nose, and a waxed black moustache, in the Adirondacks when I was that age."

Mrs. Lancaster made no reply to this, and her hostess looked at her keenly.

"Where was it? How long before—?" She started to ask, how long before she was married, but caught herself. "What did he look like? He must have been good-looking, or you would not be so pensive."

"He looked like—a man."

"How old was he—I mean, when he fell in love with you?" said Mrs. Wentworth, with a sort of gasp, as she recalled Mr. Lancaster's gray hair and elderly appearance.

"Rather young. He was only a few years older than I was; a young—what's his name?—Hercules, that brought me down a mountain in his arms the second time I ever saw him."

"Alice Lancaster!"

"I had broken my leg—almost. I had got a bad fall from a horse and could not walk, and he happened to come along."

"Of course. How romantic! Was he a doctor? Did you do it on purpose?"

Mrs. Lancaster smiled.

"No; a young schoolmaster up in the mountains. He was not handsome—not then. But he was fine-looking, eyes that looked straight at you and straight through you; the whitest teeth you ever saw; and shoulders! He could carry a sack of salt!" At the recollection a faint smile flickered about her lips.

"Why didn't you marry him?"

"He had not a cent in the world. He was a poor young school-teacher, but of a very distinguished family. However, mamma took fright, and whisked me away as if he had been a pestilence."

"Oh, naturally!"

"And he was too much in love with me. But for that I think I should not have given him up. I was dreadfully cut up for a little while. And he—" She did not finish the sentence.

On this Mrs. Wentworth made no observation, though the expression about her mouth changed.

"He made a reputation afterwards. I knew he would. He was bound to succeed. I believed in him even then. He had ideals. Why don't men have ideals now?"

"Some of them do," asserted Mrs. Wentworth.

"Yes; Norman has. I mean unmarried men. I heard he made a fortune, or was making one —or something."

"Oh!"

"He knew more than any one I ever saw— and made you want to know. All I ever read he set me to. And he is awfully good-looking. I had no idea he would be so good-looking. But I tell you this: no woman that ever saw him ever forgot him."

"Is he married?"

"I don't think so—no. If he had been I should have heard it. He really believed in me."

Mrs. Wentworth glanced at her with interest.

"Where is he staying?"

"I do not know. I saw him through a shop-window."

"What! Did you not speak to him?"

"I did not get a chance. When I came out of the shop he was gone."

"That was sad. It would have been quite romantic, would it not? But, perhaps, after all, he did not make his fortune?" Mrs. Wentworth looked complacent.

"He did if he set his mind to it," declared Mrs. Lancaster.

"How about Ferdy Wickersham?" The

least little light of malevolence crept into Mrs. Wentworth's eyes.

Mrs. Lancaster gave a shrug of impatience, and pushed a photograph on a small table farther away, as if it incommoded her.

"Oh, Ferdy Wickersham! Ferdy Wickersham to that man is a heated room to the breath of hills and forests." She spoke with real warmth, and Mrs. Wentworth gazed at her curiously for a few seconds.

"Still, I rather fancy for a constancy you'd prefer the heated rooms to the coldness of the hills. Your gowns would not look so well in the forest."

It was a moment before Mrs. Lancaster's face relaxed.

"I suppose I should," she said slowly, with something very like a sigh. "He was the only man I ever knew who made me do what I did not want to do and made me wish to be something better than I was," she added absently.

Mrs. Wentworth glanced at her somewhat impatiently, but she went on:

"I was very romantic then; and you should have heard him read the 'Idylls of the King.' He had the most beautiful voice. He made you live in Arthur's court, because he lived there himself."

Mrs. Wentworth burst into laughter, but it was not very merry.

"My dear Alice, you must have been romantic. How old were you, did you say?"

"It was three years before I was married," said Mrs. Lancaster, firmly.

Her friend gazed at her with a puzzled expression on her face.

"Oh! Now, my dear Alice, don't let's have any more of this sentimentalizing. I never indulge in it; it always gives me a headache. One might think you were a school-girl."

At the word a wood in all the bravery of Spring sprang into Alice's mind. A young girl was seated on the mossy ground, and outstretched at her feet was a young man, fresh-faced and clear-eyed, quoting a poem of youth and of love.

"Heaven knows I wish I were," said Mrs. Lancaster, soberly. "I might then be something different from what I am!"

"Oh, nonsense! You do nothing of the kind. Here are you, a rich woman, young, handsome, with a great establishment; perfectly free, with no one to interfere with you in any way. Now, I—"

"That's just it," broke in Mrs. Lancaster, bitterly. "Free! Free from what my heart

aches for. Free to dress in sables and diamonds and die of loneliness." She had sat up, and her eyes were glowing and her color flashing in her cheeks in her energy.

Mrs. Wentworth looked at her with a curious expression in her eyes.

"I want what you have, Louise Caldwell. In that big house with only ourselves and servants —sometimes I could wish I were dead. I envy every woman I see on the street with her children. Yes, I am free—too free! I married for respect, and I have it. But—I want devotion, sympathy. You have it. You have a husband who adores you, and children to fill your heart, cherish it." The light in her eyes was almost fierce as she leaned forward, her hands clasped so tightly that the knuckles showed white, and a strange look passed for a moment over Mrs. Wentworth's face.

"You are enough to give one the blue-devils!" she exclaimed, with impatience. "Let's have a liqueur." She touched a bell, but Mrs. Lancaster rose.

"No; I will go."

"Oh, yes; just a glass." A servant appeared like an automaton at the door.

"What will you have, Alice?" But Mrs. Lan-

caster was obdurate. She declined the invitation, and declared that she must go, as she was going to the opera; and the next moment the two ladies were taking leave of each other with gracious words and the formal manner that obtains in fashionable society, quite as if they had known each other just fifteen minutes.

Mrs. Lancaster drove home, leaning very far back in her brougham.

Mrs. Wentworth, too, appeared rather fatigued after her guest departed, and sat for fifteen minutes with the social column of a newspaper lying in her lap unscanned.

"I thought she and Ferdy liked each other," she said to herself; "but he must have told the truth. They cannot have cared for each other. I think she must have been in love with that man."

CHAPTER XVII

KEITH MEETS NORMAN

THE day after Keith's interview with Mr. Creamer he was walking up-town more slowly than was his wont; for gloom was beginning to take the place where disappointment had for some time been holding session. His experience that day had been more than usually disheartening. These people with all their shrewdness appeared to him to be in their way as contracted as his mountaineers. They lived to amass wealth, yet went like sheep in flocks, and were so blind that they could not recognize a great opportunity when it was presented. They were mere machines that ground through life as monotonously as the wheels in their factories, turning out riches, riches, riches.

This morning Keith had come across an article in a newspaper which, in a measure, explained his want of success. It was an article on New Leeds. It praised, in florid sentences,

the place and the people, gave a reasonably true account of the rise of the town, set forth in a veiled way a highly colored prospectus of the Wickersham properties, and asserted explicitly that all the lands of value had been secured by this company, and that such as were now being offered outside were those which Wickersham had refused as valueless after a thorough and searching examination. The falsity of the statements made Keith boil with rage. Mr. J. Quincy Plume immediately flashed into his mind.

As he walked along, the newspaper clutched in his hand, a man brushed against him. Keith's mind was far away on Quincy Plume and Ferdy Wickersham; but instinctively, as his shoulder touched a stranger's, he said:

"I beg your pardon."

At the words the other turned and glanced at him casually; then stopped, turned and caught up with him, so as to take a good look at his face. The next second a hand was on Keith's shoulder.

"Why, Gordon Keith!"

Keith glanced up in a maze at the vigorous-looking, well-dressed young man who was holding out his gloved hand to him, his blue eyes full

of a very pleasant light. Keith's mind had been so far away that for a second it did not return. Then a light broke over his face. He seized the other's hand.

"Norman Wentworth!"

The greeting between the two was so cordial that men hurrying by turned to look back at the pleasant faces, and their own set countenances softened.

Norman demanded where Keith had just come from and how long he had been in town, piling his questions one on the other with eager cordiality.

Keith looked sheepish, and began to explain in a rather shambling fashion that he had been there some time and "intended to hunt him up, of course"; but he had "been so taken up with business," etc., etc.

"I heard you were here on business. That was the way I came to know you were in town," explained Norman, "and I have looked everywhere for you. I hope you have been successful?" He was smiling. But Keith was still sore from the treatment he had received in one or two offices that morning.

"I have not been successful," he said, "and I felt sure that I should be. I have discovered

that people here are very much like people elsewhere; they are very like sheep."

"And very suspicious, timid sheep at that," said Norman. "They have often gone for wool and got shorn. So every one has to be tested. An unknown man has a hard time here. I suppose they would not look into your plan?"

"They classed me with 'pedlers, book-agents, and beggars'—I saw the signs up; looked as if they thought I was a thief. I am not used to being treated like a swindler."

"The same old Keith! You must remember how many swindlers they have to deal with, my boy. It is natural that they should require a guarantee—I mean an introduction of some kind. You remember what one of them said not long ago? 'A man spends one part of his life making a fortune and the rest of it trying to keep others from stealing it from him.' You ought to have come to me. You must come and dine with me this evening, and we will talk it over. Perhaps, I can help you. I want to show you my little home, and I have the finest boy in the world."

At the tone of cordial sincerity in his voice, Keith softened. He laid his hand on the back of Norman's and closed it tightly.

"I knew I could always count on you, and I meant, of course, to come and see you. The reason I have not come before I will explain to you sometime. I was feeling a little sore over a matter—sheer lies that some one has written." He shook the newspaper in his hand.

"Oh, don't mind that paper," said Norman. "The columns of that paper are for hire. They belong at present to an old acquaintance of ours. They do *me* the honor to pay their compliments to my affairs now and then."

Keith walked up the street with a warm feeling about his heart. That friendly face and kindly pressure of the hand had cheered him like sunshine on a wintry day, and transformed the cold, cheerless city into an abode of life and happiness. The crowds that thronged by him once more took on interest for him. The faces once more softened into human fellowship.

That evening, when Keith arrived at Norman Wentworth's, he found that what he had termed his "little house" was, in fact, a very ample and commodious mansion on one of the most fashionable avenues in the city.

Outside there was nothing to distinguish it particularly from the scores of other handsome houses that stretched for blocks up and down

the street with ever-recurrent brown-stone monotony. They were as much alike as so many box-stalls in a stable.

"If I had to live in one of these," thought Keith, as he was making his way to keep his appointment, "I should have to begin and count my house from the corner. No wonder the people are all so much alike!"

Inside, however, the personal taste of the owner counted for much more, and when Keith was admitted by the velvety-stepped servant, he found himself in a scene of luxury for which nothing that Norman had said had prepared him.

A hall, rather contracted, but sumptuous in its furnishings, opened on a series of drawing-rooms absolutely splendid with gilt and satin. One room, all gold and yellow, led into another all blue satin, and that into one where the light filtered through soft-tinted shades on tapestries and rugs of deep crimson.

Keith could not help thinking what a fortunate man Norman was, and the difference between his friend's situation in this bower of roses, and his own in his square, bare little box on the windy mountain-side, insensibly flashed over him. This was "an establishment"! How

unequally Fortune scattered her gifts! Just then, with a soft rustle of silk, the portières were parted, and Mrs. Wentworth appeared. She paused for a second just under the arch, and the young man wondered if she knew how effective she was. She was a vision of lace and loveliness. A figure straight and sinuous, above the middle height, which would have been quite perfect but for being slightly too full, and which struck one before one looked at the face; coloring that was rich to brilliance; abundant, beautiful hair with a glint of lustre on it; deep hazel eyes, the least bit too close together; and features that were good and only just missed being fine. Keith had remembered her as beautiful, but as Mrs. Wentworth stood beneath the azure portières, her long, bare arms outstretched, her lips parted in a half-smile of welcome, she was much more striking-looking than Keith's memory had recorded. As he gazed on her, the expression on his face testified his admiration.

She came forward with the same gratified smile on her face and greeted him with formal words of welcome as Norman's old friend. Her thought was, "What a strong-looking man he is! Like a picture I have seen somewhere. Why doesn't Ferdy like him?"

As she sank into a soft divan, and with a sudden twist her train fell about her feet, making an artistic drapery, Keith experienced a sense of delight. He did not dream that Mrs. Wentworth knew much better than he precisely the pose to show the curve of her white full throat and round arm. The demands of notorious beauty were already beginning to tell on her, and even while she spoke gracious words of her husband's friendship for him, she from time to time added a touch here and a soft caress there with her long white hands to make the arrangement the more complete. It was almost too perfect to be unconscious.

Suddenly Keith heard Norman's voice outside, apparently on the stair, calling cheerily "Good-by" to some one, and the next second he came hastily into the drawing-room. His hair was rumpled and his necktie a trifle awry. As he seized and wrung Keith's hand with unfeigned heartiness, Keith was suddenly conscious of a change in everything. This was warmth, sincerity, and the beautiful room suddenly became a home. Mrs. Wentworth appeared somewhat shocked at his appearance.

"Well, Norman, you are a sight! Just look at your necktie!"

"That ruffian!" he laughed, feeling at his throat and trying to adjust the crooked tie.

"What will Mr. Keith think?"

"Oh, pshaw! Keith thinks all right. Keith is one of the men I don't have to apologize to. But if I do"—he turned to Keith, smiling—"I'll show you the apology. Come along." He seized Keith by the hand and started toward the door.

"You are not going to take Mr. Keith up-stairs!" exclaimed his wife. "Remember, Mr. Keith may not share your enthusiasm."

"Wait until he sees the apology. Come along, Keith." He drew Keith toward the door.

"But, Norman, I don't think—" began Mrs. Wentworth.

What she did not think was lost to the two men; for Norman, not heeding her, had, with the eagerness of a boy, dragged his visitor out of the door and started up the stairs, telling him volubly of the treat that was in store for him in the perfections of a certain small young gentleman who had been responsible for his tardiness in appearing below.

When Norman threw back a silken portière up-stairs and flung open a door, the scene that greeted Keith was one that made him agree that

Norman was fully justified. A yellow-haired boy was rolling on the floor, kicking up his little pink legs in all the abandon of his years, while a blue-eyed little girl was sitting in a nurse's lap, making strenuous efforts to join her brother on the floor.

At sight of his father, the boy, with a whoop, scrambled to his feet, and, with outstretched arms and open mouth, showing all his little white teeth, made a rush for him, while the young lady suddenly changed her efforts to descend, and began to jump up and down in a frantic ecstacy of delight.

Norman gathered the boy up, and as soon as he could disentwine his little arms from about his neck, turned him toward Keith. The child gave the stranger one of those calm, scrutinizing looks that children give, and then, his face suddenly breaking into a smile, with a rippling laugh of good-comradeship, he sprang into Keith's outstretched arms. That gentleman's necktie was in danger of undergoing the same damaging process that had incurred Mrs. Norman's criticism, when the youngsters discovered that lady herself, standing at the door. Scrambling down from his perch on Keith's shoulder, the boy, with a shout, rushed toward his mother.

Mrs. Wentworth, with a little shriek, stopped him and held him off from her; she could not permit him to disarrange her toilet; her coiffure had cost too much thought; but the pair were evidently on terms of good-fellowship, and the light in the mother's eyes even as she restrained the boy's attempt at caresses changed her, and gave Keith a new insight into her character.

Keith and the hostess returned to the drawing-room before Norman, and she was no longer the professional beauty, the cold woman of the world, the mere fashionable hostess. The doors were flung open more than once as Keith talked warmly of the boy, and within Keith got glimpses of what was hidden there, which made him rejoice again that his friend had such a treasure. These glimpses of unexpected softness drew him nearer to her than he had ever expected to be, and on his part he talked to her with a frankness and earnestness which sank deep into her mind, and opened the way to a warmer friendship than she usually gave.

"Norman is right," she said to herself. "This is a man."

At the thought a light flashed upon her. It suddenly came to her.

This is "the ghost"! Yet could it be possible? She solved the question quickly.

"Mr. Keith, did you ever know Alice Lancaster?"

"Alice Lancaster—?" For a bare second he looked puzzled. "Oh, Miss Alice Yorke? Yes, a long time ago." He was conscious that his expression had changed. So he added: "I used to know her very well."

"Decidedly, this is the ghost," reflected Mrs. Wentworth to herself, as she scanned anew Keith's strong features and sinewy frame. "Alice said if a woman had ever seen him, she would not be likely to forget him, and I think she was right."

"Why do you ask me?" inquired Keith, who had now quite recovered from his little confusion. "Of course, you know her?"

"Yes, very well. We were at school together. She is my best friend, almost." She shut her mouth as firmly as though this were the last sentence she ever proposed to utter; but her eyes, as they rested on Keith's face, had the least twinkle in them. Keith did not know how much of their old affair had been told her, but she evidently knew something, and it was necessary to show her that he had recovered from it long

ago and yet retained a friendly feeling for Mrs. Lancaster.

"She was an old sweetheart of mine long ago; that is, I used to think myself desperately in love with her a hundred years ago or so, before she was married—and I was, too," he added.

He gained not the least idea of the impression this made on Mrs. Wentworth.

"She was talking to me about you only the other day," she said casually.

Keith again made a feint to open her defence.

"I hope she said kind things about me? I deserve some kindness at her hands, for I have only pleasant memories of her."

"I wonder what he means by that?" questioned Mrs. Wentworth to herself, and then added:

"Oh, yes; she did. Indeed, she was almost enthusiastic about your—friendship." Her eyes scanned his face lightly.

"Has she fulfilled the promise of beauty that she gave as a school-girl? I used to think her one of the most beautiful creatures in the world; but I don't know that I was capable of judging at that time," he added, with a smile, "for I remember I was quite desperate about her for a little while." He tried to speak naturally.

Mrs. Wentworth's eyes rested on his face for a moment.

"Why, yes; many think her much handsomer than she ever was. She is one of the married beauties, you know." Her eyes just swept Keith's face.

"She was also one of the sweetest girls I ever knew," Keith said, moved for some reason to add this tribute.

"Well, I don't know that every one would call her that. Indeed, I am not quite sure that I should call her that myself always; but she can be sweet. My children adore her, and I think that is always a good sign."

"Undoubtedly. They judge correctly, because directly."

The picture of a young girl in a riding-habit kneeling in the dust with a chubby, little, ragged child in her arms flashed before Keith's mental vision. And he almost gave a gasp.

"Is she married happily?" he asked. "I hope she is happy."

"Oh, as happy as the day is long," declared Mrs. Wentworth, cheerfully. Deep down in her eyes was a wicked twinkle of malice. Her face wore a look of content. "He is not altogether indifferent yet," she said to herself. And when

Keith said firmly that he was very glad to hear it, she did him the honor to disbelieve him.

"Of course, you know that Mr. Lancaster is a good deal older than Alice?"

Yes, Keith had heard so.

"But a charming man, and immensely rich."

"Yes." Keith began to look grim.

"Aren't you going to see her?" inquired Mrs. Wentworth, finding that Keith was not prepared to say any more on the subject.

Keith said he should like to do so very much. He hoped to see her before going away; but he could not tell.

"She is married now, and must be so taken up with her new duties that I fear she would hardly remember me," he added, with a laugh. "I don't think I ever made much impression on her."

"Alice Yorke is not one to forget her friends. Why, she spoke of you with real friendship," she said, smiling, thinking to herself, Alice likes him, and he is still in love with her. This begins to be interesting.

"A woman does not have to give up all her friends when she marries?" she added, with her eyes on Keith.

Keith smiled.

"Oh, no; only her lovers, unless they turn into friends."

"Of course, those," said Mrs. Wentworth, who, after a moment's reflection, added, "They don't always do that. Do you believe a woman ever forgets entirely a man she has really loved?"

"She does if she is happily married and if she is wise."

"But all women are not happly married."

"And, perhaps, all are not wise," said Keith.

Some association of ideas led him to say suddenly:

"Tell me something about Ferdy Wickersham. He was one of your ushers, wasn't he?" He was surprised to see Mrs. Wentworth's countenance change. Her eyelids closed suddenly as if a glare were turned unexpectedly on them, and she caught her breath.

"Yes—I have known him since we were children. Of course, you know he was desperately in love with Alice Lancaster?"

Keith said he had heard something of the kind.

"He still likes her."

"She is married," said Keith, decisively.

"Yes."

A moment later Mrs. Wentworth drew a long breath and moistened her lips.

"You knew him at the same time that you first knew Norman, did you not?" She was simply figuring for time.

"Yes, I met him first then," said Keith.

"Don't you think Ferdy has changed since he was a boy?" she demanded after a moment's reflection.

"How do you mean?" Keith was feeling very uncomfortable, and, to save himself an answer, plunged along:

"Of course he has changed." He did not say how, nor did he give Mrs. Wentworth time to explain herself. "I will tell you one thing, though," he said earnestly: "he never was worthy to loose the latchet of your husband's shoe."

Mrs. Wentworth's face changed again; she glanced down for a second, and then said:

"You and Norman have a mutual admiration society."

"We have been friends a long time," said Keith, thoughtfully.

"But even that does not always count for so much. Friendships seem so easily broken these days."

"Because there are so few Norman Wentworths. That man is blessed who has such a friend," said the young man, earnestly.

Mrs. Wentworth looked at him with a curious light in her eyes, and as she gazed her face grew more thoughtful. Then, as Norman reappeared she changed the subject abruptly.

After dinner, while they were smoking, Norman made Keith tell him of his coal-lands and the business that had brought him to New York. To Keith's surprise, he seemed to know something of it already.

"You should have come to me at first," he said. "I might, at least, have been able to counteract somewhat the adverse influence that has been working against you." His brow clouded a little.

"Wickersham appears to be quite a personage here. I wonder he has not been found out," said Keith after a little reverie.

Norman shifted slightly in his chair. "Oh, he is not worth bothering about. Give me your lay-out now."

Keith put him in possession of the facts, and he became deeply interested. He had, indeed, a dual motive: one of friendship for Keith; the other he as yet hardly confessed even to himself.

The next day Keith met Norman by appointment and gave him his papers. And a day or two afterwards he met a number of his friends at lunch.

They were capitalists and, if General Keith's old dictum, that gentlemen never discussed money at table, was sound, they would scarcely have met his requirement; for the talk was almost entirely of money. When they rose from the table, Keith, as he afterwards told Norman, felt like a squeezed orange. The friendliest man to him was Mr. Yorke, whom Keith found to be a jovial, sensible little man with kindly blue eyes and a humorous mouth. His chief cross-examiner was a Mr. Kestrel, a narrow-faced, parchment-skinned man with a thin white moustache that looked as if it had led a starved existence on his bloodless lip.

"Those people down there are opposed to progress," he said, buttoning up his pockets in a way he had, as if he were afraid of having them picked. "I guess the Wickershams have found that out. I don't see any money in it."

"It is strange that Kestrel doesn't see money in this," said Mr. Yorke, with a twinkle in his eye; "for he usually sees money in everything. I guess there were other reasons than

want of progress for the Wickershams not paying dividends."

A few days later Norman informed Keith that the money was nearly all subscribed; but Keith did not know until afterwards how warmly he had indorsed him.

"You said something about sheep the other day; well, a sheep is a solitary and unsocial animal to a city-man with money to invest. My grandfather's man used to tell me: 'Sheep is kind of gregarious, Mr. Norman. Coax the first one through and you can't keep the others out.' Even Kestrel is jumping to get in."

CHAPTER XVIII

MRS. LANCASTER

KEITH had not yet met Mrs. Lancaster. He meant to call on her before leaving town; for he would show her that he was successful, and also that he had recovered. Also he wanted to see her, and in his heart was a lurking hope that she might regret having lost him. A word that Mrs. Wentworth had let fall the first evening he dined there had kept him from calling before.

A few evenings later Keith was dining with the Norman Wentworths, and after dinner Norman said:

"By the way, we are going to a ball to-night. Won't you come along? It will really be worth seeing."

Keith, having no engagement, was about to accept, but he was aware that Mrs. Wentworth, at her husband's words, had turned and given him a quick look of scrutiny, that swept him from the top of his head to the toe of his boot.

He had had that swift glance of inspection sweep him up and down many times of late, in business offices. The look, however, appeared to satisfy his hostess; for after a bare pause she seconded her husband's invitation.

That pause had given Keith time to reflect, and he declined to go. But Norman, too, had seen the glance his wife had given, and he urged his acceptance so warmly and with such real sincerity that finally Keith yielded.

"This is not one of *the* balls," said Norman, laughingly. "It is only *a* ball, one of our subscription dances, so you need have no scruples about going along."

Keith looked a little mystified.

"Mrs. Creamer's balls are *the* balls, my dear fellow. There, in general, only the rich and the noble enter—rich in prospect and noble in title—"

"Norman, how can you talk so!" exclaimed Mrs. Wentworth, with some impatience. "You know better than that. Mrs. Creamer has always been particularly kind to us. Why, she asks me to receive with her every winter."

But Norman was in a bantering mood. "Am not I rich and you noble?" he laughed. "Do you suppose, my dear, that Mrs. Creamer would

ask you to receive with her if we lived two or three squares off Fifth Avenue? It is as hard for a poor man to enter Mrs. Creamer's house as for a camel to pass through the needle's eye. Her motions are sidereal and her orbit is as regulated as that of a planet."

Mrs. Wentworth protested.

"Why, she has all sorts of people at her house—!"

"Except the unsuccessful. Even planets have a little eccentricity of orbit."

An hour or two later Keith found himself in such a scene of radiance as he had never witnessed before in all his life. Though, as Norman had said, it was not one of the great balls, to be present at it was in some sort a proof of one's social position and possibly of one's pecuniary condition.

Keith was conscious of that same feeling of novelty and exhilaration that had come over him when he first arrived in the city. It came upon him when he first stepped from the cool outer air into the warm atmosphere of the brilliantly lighted building and stood among the young men, all perfectly dressed and appointed, and almost as similar as the checks they were receiving from the busy servants in the

cloak-room. The feeling grew stronger as he mounted the wide marble stairway to the broad landing, which was a bower of palms and flowers, with handsome women passing in and out like birds in gorgeous plumage, and gay voices sounding in his ears. It swept over him like a flood when he entered the spacious ball-room and gazed upon the dazzling scene before him.

"This is Aladdin's palace," he declared as he stood looking across the large ball-room. "The Arabian Nights have surely come again."

Mrs. Wentworth, immediately after presenting Keith to one or two ladies who were receiving, had been met and borne off by Ferdy Wickersham, and was in the throng at the far end of the great apartment, and some one had stopped Norman on the stairway. So Keith was left for a moment standing alone just inside the door. He had a sense of being charmed. Later, he tried to account for it. Was it the sight before him? Even such perfect harmony of color could hardly have done it. It must be the dazzling radiance of youth that almost made his eyes ache with its beauty. Perhaps, it was the strain of the band hidden in the gallery among those palms. The waltz music that floated down always set him swinging back in the land of

memory. He stood for a moment quite entranced. Then he was suddenly conscious of being lonely. In all the throng before him he could not see one soul that he knew. His friends were far away.

Suddenly the wheezy strains of the fiddles and the blare of the horns in the big dining-room of the old Windsor back in the mountains sounded in his ears, and the motley but gay and joyous throng that tramped and capered and swung over the rough boards, setting the floor to swinging and the room to swaying, swam in a dim mist before his eyes. Girls in ribbons so gay that they almost made the eyes ache, faces flushed with the excitement and joy of the dance; smiling faces, snowy teeth, dishevelled hair, tarlatan dresses, green and pink and white; ringing laughter and whoops of real merriment—all passed before his senses.

As he stood looking on the scene of splendor, he felt lost, lonely, and for a moment homesick. Here all was formal, stiff, repressed; that gayety was real, that merriment was sincere. With all their crudeness, those people in that condition were all human, hearty, strong, real. He wondered if refinement and elegance meant necessarily a suppression of all these. There,

men came not only to enjoy but to make others enjoy as well. No stranger could have stood a moment alone without some one stepping to his side and drawing him into a friendly talk. This mood soon changed.

Still, standing alone near the door waiting for Norman to appear, Keith found entertainment watching the groups, the splendidly dressed women, clustered here and there or moving about inspecting or speaking to each other. One figure at the far end of the room attracted his eye again and again. She was standing with her back partly turned toward him, but he knew that she was a pretty woman as well as a handsome one, though he saw her face only in profile, and she was too far off for him to see it very well. Her hair was arranged simply; her head was set beautifully on her shoulders. She was dressed in black, the bodice covered with spangles that with her slightest movement shimmered and reflected the light like a coat of flexible mail. A number of men were standing about her, and many women, as they passed, held out their hands to her in the way that ladies of fashion have. Keith saw Mrs. Wentworth approach her, and a very animated conversation appeared to take place between them,

and the lady in black turned quickly and gazed about the room; then Mrs. Wentworth started to move away, but the other caught and held her, asking her something eagerly. Mrs. Wentworth must have refused to answer, for she followed her a few steps; but Mrs. Wentworth simply waved her hand to her and swept away with her escort, laughing back at her over her shoulder.

Keith made his way around the room toward Mrs. Wentworth. There was something about the young lady in black which reminded him of a girl he had once seen standing straight and defiant, yet very charming, in a woodland path under arching pine-boughs. Just then, however, a waltz struck up and Mrs. Wentworth began to dance, so Keith stood leaning against the wall. Presently a member of a group of young men near Keith said:

"The Lancaster looks well to-night."

"She does. The old man's at home, Ferdy's on deck."

"Ferdy be dashed! Besides, where is Mrs. Went—?"

"Don't lay any money on that."

"She's all right. Try to say anything to her and you'll find out."

The others laughed, and one of them asked:

"Been trying yourself, Stirling?"

"No. I know better, Minturn."

"Why doesn't she shake Ferdy then?" demanded the other. "He's always hanging around when he isn't around the other."

"Oh, they have been friends all their lives. She is not going to give up a friend, especially when others are getting down on him. Can't you allow anything to friendship?"

"Ferdy's friendship is pretty expensive," said his friend, sententiously.

Keith took a glance at the speakers to see if he could by following their gaze place Mrs. Lancaster. The one who defended the lady was a jolly-looking man with a merry eye and a humorous mouth. The other two were as much alike as their neckties, their collars, their shirt-fronts, their dress-suits, or their shoes, in which none but a tailor could have discovered the least point of difference. Their cheeks were smooth, their chins were round, their hair as perfectly parted and brushed as a barber's. Keith had an impression that he had seen them just before on the other side of the room, talking to the lady in black; but as he looked across, he saw the other young men still there, and there

were yet others elsewhere. At the first glance they nearly all looked alike. Just then he became conscious that a couple had stopped close beside him. He glanced at them; the lady was the same to whom he had seen Mrs. Wentworth speaking at the other end of the room. Her face was turned away, and all he saw was an almost perfect figure with shoulders that looked dazzling in contrast with her shimmering black gown. A single red rose was stuck in her hair. He was waiting to get a look at her face, when she turned toward him.

"Why, Mr. Keith!" she exclaimed, her blue eyes open wide with surprise. She held out her hand. "I don't believe you know me?"

"Then you must shut your eyes," said Keith, smiling his pleasure.

"I don't believe I should have known you? Yes, I should; I should have known you anywhere."

"Perhaps, I have not changed so much," smiled Keith.

She gave him just the ghost of a glance out of her blue eyes.

"I don't know. Have you been carrying any sacks of salt lately?" She assumed a lighter air.

"No; but heavier burdens still."

"Are you married?"

Keith laughed.

"No; not so heavy as that—yet."

"So heavy as that *yet!* Oh, you are engaged?"

"No; not engaged either—except engaged in trying to make a lot of people who think they know everything understand that there are a few things that they don't know."

"That is a difficult task," she said, shaking her head, "if you try it in New York."

"'John P. Robinson, he
Says they don't know everything down in Judee,'"

put in the stout young man who had been standing by waiting to speak to her.

"But this isn't Judee yet," she laughed, "for I assure you we do know everything here, Mr. Keith." She held out her hand to the gentleman who had spoken, and after greeting him introduced him to Keith as "Mr. Stirling."

"You ought to like each other," she said cordially.

Keith professed his readiness to do so.

"I don't know about that," said Stirling, jovially. "You are too friendly to him."

"What are you doing? Where are you staying? How long are you going to be in town?" demanded Mrs. Lancaster, turning to Keith.

"Mining.—At the Brunswick.—Only a day or two," said Keith, laughing.

"Mining? Gild-mining?"

"No; not yet."

"Where?"

"Down South at a place called New Leeds. It's near the place where I used to teach. It's a great city. Why, we think New York is jealous of us."

"Oh, I know about that. A friend of mine put a little money down there for me. You know him? Ferdy Wickersham?"

"Yes, I know him."

"Most of us know him," observed Mr. Stirling, turning his eyes on Keith.

"Of course, you must know him. Are you in with him? He tells me that they own pretty much everything that is good in that region. They are about to open a new mine that is to exceed anything ever known. Ferdy tells me I am good for I don't know how much. The stock is to be put on the exchange in a little while, and I got in on the ground-floor. That's

what they call it—the lowest floor of all, you know?"

"Yes; some people call it the ground-floor," said Keith, wishing to change the subject.

"You know there may be a cellar under a ground-floor," observed Mr. Stirling, demurely.

Keith looked at him, and their eyes met.

Fortunately, perhaps, for Keith, some one came up just then and claimed a dance with Mrs. Lancaster. She moved away, and then turned back.

"I shall see you again?"

"Yes. Why, I hope so—certainly."

She stopped and looked at him.

"When are you going away?"

"Why, I don't exactly know. Very soon. Perhaps, in a day or two."

"Well, won't you come to see us? Here, I will give you my address. Have you a card?" She took the pencil he offered her and wrote her number on it. "Come some afternoon—about six; Mr. Lancaster is always in then," she said sedately. "I am sure you will like each other."

Keith bowed.

She floated off smiling. What she had said to Mrs. Wentworth occurred to her.

"Yes; he looks like a man." She became conscious that her companion was asking a question.

"What is the matter with you?" he said. "I have asked you three times who that man was, and you have not said a word."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. Mr. Keith, an old friend of mine," she said, and changed the subject.

As to her old friend, he was watching her as she danced, winding in and out among the intervening couples. He wondered that he could ever have thought that a creature like that could care for him and share his hard life. He might as soon have expected a bird-of-paradise to live by choice in a coal-bunker.

He strolled about, looking at the handsome women, and presently found himself in the conservatory. Turning a clump of palms, he came on Mrs. Wentworth and Mr. Wickersham sitting together talking earnestly. Keith was about to go up and speak to Mrs. Wentworth, but her escort said something under his breath to her, and she looked away. So Keith passed on.

A little later, Keith went over to where Mrs. Lancaster stood. Several men were about her, and just after Keith joined her, another man

walked up, if any movement so lazy and sauntering could be termed walking.

"I have been wondering why I did not see you," he drawled as he came up.

Keith recognized the voice of Ferdy Wickersham. He turned and faced him; but if Mr. Wickersham was aware of his presence, he gave no sign of it. His dark eyes were on Mrs. Lancaster. She turned to him.

"Perhaps, Ferdinand, it was because you did not use your eyes. That is not ordinarily a fault of yours."

"I never think of my eyes when yours are present," said he, lazily.

"Oh, don't you?" laughed Mrs. Lancaster. "What were you doing a little while ago in the conservatory—with—?"

"Nothing. I have not been in the conservatory this evening. You have paid some one else a compliment."

"Tell that to some one who does not use her eyes," said Mrs. Lancaster, mockingly.

"There are occasions when you must disbelieve the sight of your eyes." He was looking her steadily in the face, and Keith saw her expression change. She recovered herself.

"Last time I saw you, you vowed you had

eyes for none but me, you may remember?'' she said lightly.

''No. Did I? Life is too awfully short to remember. But it is true. It is the present in which I find my pleasure.''

Up to this time neither Mrs. Lancaster nor Mr. Wickersham had taken any notice of Keith, who stood a little to one side, waiting, with his eyes resting on the other young man's face. Mrs. Lancaster now turned.

''Oh, Mr. Keith.'' She now turned back to Mr. Wickersham. ''You know Mr. Keith?''

Keith was about to step forward to greet his old acquaintance; but Wickersham barely nodded.

''Ah, how do you do? Yes, I know Mr. Keith. —If I can take care of the present, I let the past and the future take care of themselves,'' he continued to Mrs. Lancaster. ''Come and have a turn. That will make the present worth all of the past.''

''Ferdy, you are discreet,'' said one of the other men, with a laugh.

''My dear fellow,'' said the young man, turning, ''I assure you, you don't know half my virtues.''

"What are your virtues, Ferdy?"

"One is not interfering with others." He turned back to Mrs. Lancaster. "Come, have a turn." He took one of his hands from his pocket and held it out.

"I am engaged," said Mrs. Lancaster.

"Oh, that makes no difference. You are always engaged; come," he said.

"I beg your pardon. It makes a difference in *this* case," said Keith, coming forward. "I believe this is my turn, Mrs. Lancaster?"

Wickersham's glance swept across, but did not rest on him, though it was enough for Keith to meet it for a second, and, without looking, the young man turned lazily away.

"Shall we find a seat?" Mrs. Lancaster asked as she took Keith's arm.

"Delighted, unless you prefer to dance."

"I did not know that dancing was one of your accomplishments," she said as they strolled along.

"Maybe, I have acquired several accomplishments that you do not know of. It has been a long time since you knew me," he answered lightly. As they turned, his eyes fell on Wickersham. He was standing where they had left

him, his eyes fastened on them malevolently. As Keith looked he started and turned away. Mrs. Lancaster had also seen him.

"What is there between you and Ferdy?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"There must be. Did you ever have a row with him?"

"Yes; but that was long ago."

"I don't know. He has a good memory. He does n't like you." She spoke reflectively.

"Does n't he?" laughed Keith. "Well, I must try and sustain it as best I can."

"And you don't like him? Few men like him. I wonder why that is?"

"And many women?" questioned Keith, as for a moment he recalled Mrs. Wentworth's face when he spoke of him.

"Some women," she corrected, with a quick glance at him. She reflected, and then went on: "I think it is partly because he is so bold and partly that he never appears to know any one else. It is the most insidious flattery in the world. I like him because I have known him all my life. I know him perfectly."

"Yes?" Keith spoke politely.

She read his thought. "You wonder if I

really know him? Yes, I do. But, somehow, I cling to those I knew in my girlhood. You don't believe that, but I do." She glanced at him and then looked away.

"Yes, I do believe it. Then let's be friends—old friends," said Keith. He held out his hand, and when she took it grasped hers firmly.

"Who is here with you to-night?" he asked.

"No one. Mr. Lancaster does not care for balls."

"Won't you give me the pleasure of seeing you home?"

She hesitated for a moment, and then said:

"I will drop you at your hotel. It is right on my way home."

Just then some one came up and joined the group.

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Lancaster! How well you are looking this evening!"

The full voice, no less than the words, sounded familiar to Keith, and turning, he recognized the young clergyman whom he had met at Mrs. Wentworth's when he passed through New York some years before. The years had plainly used Mr. Rimmon well. He was dressed in an evening suit with a clerical waistcoat which showed that his plump frame had taken

on an extra layer, and a double chin was beginning to rest on his collar.

Mrs. Lancaster smiled as she returned his greeting.

"You are my stand-by, Mr. Rimmon. I always know that, no matter what others may say of me, I shall be sure of at least one compliment before the evening is over if you are present."

"That is because you always deserve it." He put his head on one side like an aldermanic robin. "Ah, if you knew how many compliments I do pay you which you never hear! My entire life is a compliment to you," declared Mr. Rimmon.

"Not your entire life, Mr. Rimmon. You are like some other men. You confound me with some one else; for I am sure I heard you saying the same thing five minutes ago to Louise Wentworth."

"Impossible. Then I must have confounded her with you," sighed Mr. Rimmon, with such a look at Mrs. Lancaster out of his languishing eyes that she gave him a laughing tap with her fan.

"Go and practise that on a débutante. I am an old married woman, remember."

"Ah, me!" sighed the gentleman. "'Marriage and Death and Division make barren our lives.'"

"Where does that come from?" asked Mrs. Lancaster.

"Ah! from—ah—" began Mr. Rimmon, then catching Keith's eyes resting on him with an amused look in them, he turned red.

She addressed Keith. "Mr. Keith, you quoted that to me once; where does it come from? From the Bible?"

"No."

"I read it in the newspaper and was so struck by it that I remembered it," said Mr. Rimmon.

"I read it in 'Laus Veneris,'" said Keith, dryly, with his eyes on the other's face. It pleased him to see it redden.

Keith, as he passed through the rooms, caught sight of an old lady over in a corner. He could scarcely believe his senses; it was Miss Abigail. She was sitting back against the wall, watching the crowd with eyes as sharp as needles. Sometimes her thin lips twitched, and her bright eyes snapped with inward amusement. Keith made his way over to her. She was so much engaged that he stood beside her

a moment without her seeing him. Then she turned and glanced at him.

"'A chiel's amang ye takin' notes,'" he said, laughing and holding out his hand.

"'An', faith! she'll prent 'em,'" she answered, with a nod. "How are you? I am glad to see you. I was just wishing I had somebody to enjoy this with me, but not a man. I ought to be gone; and so ought you, young man. I started, but I thought if I could get in a corner by myself where there were no men I might stay a little while and look at it; for I certainly never saw anything like this before, and I don't think I ever shall again. I certainly do not think you ought to see it."

Keith laughed, and she continued:

"I knew things had changed since I was a girl; but I didn't know it was as bad as this. Why, I don't think it ought to be allowed."

"What?" asked Keith.

"This." She waved her hand to include the dancing throng before them. "They tell me all those women dancing around there are married."

"I believe many of them are."

"Why don't those young women have partners?"

"Why, some of them do. I suppose the others are not attractive enough, or something."

"Especially *something*," said the old lady. "Where are their husbands?"

"Why, some of them are at home, and some are here."

"Where?" The old lady turned her eyes on a couple that sailed by her, the man talking very earnestly to his companion, who was listening breathlessly. "Is that her husband?"

"Well, no; that is not, I believe."

"No; I'll be bound it is not. You never saw a married man talking to his wife in public in that way—unless they were talking about the last month's bills. Why, it is perfectly brazen."

Keith laughed.

"Where is *her* husband?" she demanded, as Mrs. Wentworth floated by, a vision of brocaded satin and lace and white shoulders, supported by Ferdy Wickersham, who was talking earnestly and looking down into her eyes languishingly.

"Oh, her husband is here."

"Well, he had better take her home to her little children. If ever I saw a face that I distrusted it is that man's."

"Why, that is Ferdy Wickersham. He is one of the leaders of society. He is considered quite an Adonis," observed Keith.

"And I don't think Adonis was a very proper person for a young woman with children to be dancing with in attire in which only her husband should see her." She shut her lips grimly. "I know him," she added. "I know all about them for three generations. One of the misfortunes of age is that when a person gets as old as I am she knows so much evil about people. I knew that young man's grandfather when he was a worthy mechanic. His wife was an uppish hussy who thought herself better than her husband, and their daughter was a pretty girl with black eyes and rosy cheeks. They sent her off to school, and after the first year or two she never came back. She had got above them. Her father told me as much. The old man cried about it. He said his wife thought it was all right; that his girl had married a smart young fellow who was a clerk in a bank; but that if he had a hundred other children he'd never teach them any more than to read, write, and figure. And to think that her son should be the Adonis dancing with my cousin Everett Wentworth's

daughter-in-law! Why, my Aunt Wentworth would rise from her grave if she knew it!"

"Well, times have changed," said Keith, laughing. "You see they are as good as anybody now."

"Not as good as anybody,—you mean as rich as anybody."

"That amounts to about the same thing here, doesn't it?"

"I believe it does, here," said the old lady, with a sniff. "Well," she said after a pause, "I think I will go back and tell Matilda what I have seen. And if you are wise you will come with me, too. This is no place for plain, country-bred people like you and me."

Keith, laughing, said he had an engagement, but he would like to have the privilege of taking her home, and then he could return.

"With a married woman, I suppose? Yes, I will be bound it is," she added as Keith nodded. "You see the danger of evil association. I shall write to your father and tell him that the sooner he gets you out of New York the better it will be for your morals and your manners. For you are the only man, except Norman, who has been so provincial as to take notice of an unknown old woman."

So she went chatting merrily down the stairway to her carriage, making her observations on whatever she saw with the freshness of a girl.

"Do you think Norman is happy?" she suddenly asked Keith.

"Why—yes; don't you think so? He has everything on earth to make him happy," said Keith, with some surprise. But even at the moment it flitted across his mind that there was something which he had felt rather than observed in Mrs. Wentworth's attitude toward her husband.

"Except that he has married a fool," said the old lady, briefly. "Don't you marry a fool, you hear?"

"I believe she is devoted to Norman and to her children," Keith began, but Miss Abigail interrupted him.

"And why should n't she be? Isn't she his wife? She gives him, perhaps, what is left over after her devotion to herself, her house, her frocks, her jewels, and—Adonis."

"Oh, I don't believe she cares for him," declared Keith. "It is impossible."

"I don't believe she does either, but she cares for herself, and he flatters her. The idea of a

Norman Wentworth's wife being flattered by the attention of a tinker's grandson!"

When the ball broke up and Mrs. Lancaster's carriage was called, several men escorted her to it. Wickersham, who was trying to recover ground which something told him he had lost, followed her down the stairway with one or two other men, and after she had entered the carriage stood leaning in at the door while he made his adieus and peace at the same moment.

"You were not always so cruel to me," he said in a low tone.

Mrs. Lancaster laughed genuinely.

"I was never cruel to you, Ferdy; you mistake leniency for harshness."

"No one else would say that to me."

"So much the more pity. You would be a better man if you had the truth told you oftener."

"When did you become such an advocate of Truth? Is it this man?"

"What man?"

"Keith. If it is, I want to tell you that he is not what he pretends."

A change came over Mrs. Lancaster's face.

"He is a gentleman," she said coldly.

"Oh, is he? He was a stage-driver."

Mrs. Lancaster drew herself up.

"If he was—" she began. But she stopped suddenly, glanced beyond Wickersham, and moved over to the further side of the carriage.

Just then a hand was laid on Wickersham's arm, and a voice behind him said:

"I beg your pardon."

Wickersham knew the voice, and without looking around stood aside for the speaker to make his adieus. Keith stepped into the carriage and pulled to the door before the footman could close it.

At the sound the impatient horses started off, leaving three men standing in the street looking very blank. Stirling was the first to speak; he turned to the others in amazement.

"Who is Keith?" he demanded.

"Oh, a fellow from the South somewhere."

"Well, Keith knows his business!" said Mr. Stirling, with a nod of genuine admiration.

Wickersham uttered an imprecation and turned back into the house.

Next day Mr. Stirling caught Wickersham in a group of young men at the club, and told them the story.

"Look out for Keith," he said. "He gave me a lesson."

Wickersham growled an inaudible reply.

"Who was the lady? Wickersham tries to capture so many prizes, what you say gives us no light," said Mr. Minturn, one of the men.

"Oh, no. I'll only tell you it's not the one you think," said the jolly bachelor. "But I am going to take lessons of that man Keith. These countrymen surprise me sometimes."

"He was a d—d stage-driver," said Wickersham.

"Then you had better take lessons from him, Ferdy," said Stirling. "He drives well. He's a veteran."

When Keith reached his room he lit a cigar and flung himself into a chair. Somehow, the evening had not left a pleasant impression on his mind. Was this the Alice Yorke he had worshipped, revered? Was this the woman whom he had canonized throughout these years? Why was she carrying on an affair with Ferdy Wickersham? What did he mean by those last words at the carriage? She said she knew him. Then she must know what his reputation was. Now and then it came to Keith that it was nothing to him. Mrs. Lancaster was married, and her affairs could not concern him. But they did concern him. They had agreed to be old friends—old friends. He would be a true friend to her.

He rose and threw away his half-smoked cigar.

Keith called on Mrs. Lancaster just before he left for the South. Though he had no such motive when he put off his visit, he could not have done a wiser thing. It was a novel experience for her to invite a man to call on her and not have him jump at the proposal, appear promptly next day, frock-coat, kid gloves, smooth flattery, and all; and when Keith had not appeared on the third day after the ball, it set her to thinking. She imagined at first that he must have been called out of town, but Mrs. Norman, whom she met, dispelled this idea. Keith had dined with them informally the evening before.

"He appeared to be in high spirits," added the lady. "His scheme has succeeded, and he is about to go South. Norman took it up and put it through for him."

"I know it," said Mrs. Lancaster, demurely.

Mrs. Wentworth's form stiffened slightly; but her manner soon became gracious again. "Ferdy says there is nothing in it."

Could he be offended, or afraid—of himself? reflected Mrs. Lancaster. Mrs. Wentworth's next observation disposed of this theory also.

"You ought to hear him talk of you. By the way, I have found out who that ghost was."

Mrs. Lancaster threw a mask over her face.

"He says you have more than fulfilled the promise of your girlhood: that you are the handsomest woman he has seen in New York, my dear," pursued the other, looking down at her own shapely figure. "Of course, I do not agree with him, quite," she laughed. "But, then, people will differ."

"Louise Wentworth, vanity is a deadly sin," said the other, smiling, "and we are told in the Commandments—I forget which one—to envy nothing of our neighbor's."

"He said he wanted to go to see you; that you had kindly invited him, and he wished very much to meet Mr. Lancaster," said Mrs. Wentworth, blandly.

"Yes, I am sure they will like each other," said Mrs. Lancaster, with dignity. "Mamma also is very anxious to see him. She used to know him when—when he was a boy, and liked him very much, too, though she would not acknowledge it to me then." She laughed softly at some recollection.

"He spoke of your mother most pleasantly," declared Mrs. Wentworth, not without Mrs.

Lancaster noticing that she was claiming to stand as Keith's friend.

"Well, I shall not be at home to-morrow," she began. "I have promised to go out to-morrow afternoon."

"Oh, sha'n't you? Why, what a pity! because he said he was going to pay his calls to-morrow, as he expected to leave to-morrow night. I think he would be very sorry not to see you."

"Oh, well, then, I will stay in. My other engagement is of no consequence."

Her friend looked benign.

Recollecting Mrs. Wentworth's expression, Mrs. Lancaster determined that she would not be at home the following afternoon. She would show Mrs. Wentworth that she could not gauge her so easily as she fancied. But at the last moment, after putting on her hat, she changed her mind. She remained in, and ended by inviting Keith to dinner that evening, an invitation which was so graciously seconded by Mr. Lancaster that Keith, finding that he could take a later train, accepted. Mrs. Yorke was at the dinner, too, and how gracious she was to Keith! She "could scarcely believe he was the same man she had known a few years before." She

"had heard a great deal of him, and had come around to dinner on purpose to meet him." This was true.

"And you have done so well, too, I hear. Your friends are very pleased to know of your success," she said graciously.

Keith smilingly admitted that he had had, perhaps, better fortune than he deserved; but this Mrs. Yorke amiably would by no means allow.

"Mrs. Wentworth—not Louise—I mean the elder Mrs. Wentworth—was speaking of you. You and Norman were great friends when you were boys, she tells me. They were great friends of ours, you know, long before we met you."

He wondered how much the Wentworths' indorsement counted for in securing Mrs. Yorke's invitation. For a good deal, he knew; but as much credit as he gave it he was within the mark.

It was only her environment. She could no more escape from that than if she were in prison. She gauged every one by what others thought, and she possessed no other gauge. Yet there was a certain friendliness, too, in Mrs. Yorke. The good lady had softened with the

years, and at heart she had always liked Keith.

Most of her conversation was of her friends and their position. Alice was thinking of going abroad soon to visit some friends on the other side, "of a very distinguished family," she told Keith.

When Keith left the Lancaster house that night Alice Lancaster knew that he had wholly recovered.

END OF VOLUME I